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WITH EDGED TOOLS.

CHAPTER IX.

TO PASS THE TIME.

Quand on n'a pas ce que l'on aime, il faut aimer ce que l'on a.

'YOUR energy, my dear lady, is not the least of many attributes.'

Lady Cantourne looked up from her writing-desk with her brightest smile. Sir John Meredith was standing by the open window, leaning against the jamb thereof with a grace that had lost its youthful repose. He was looking out, across a sloping lawn, over the Solent, and for that purpose he had caused himself to be clad in a suit of blue serge. He looked the veteran yachtsman to perfection—he could look anything in its season—but he did his yachting from the shore—by preference from the drawing-room window.

'One must keep up with the times, John,' replied the lady, daintily dipping her quill.

'And "the times" fills its house from roof to cellar with people who behave as if they were in a hotel. Some of them—say number five on the first floor, number eleven on the second, or some of the atticated relatives—announce at breakfast that they will not be home to lunch. Another says he cannot possibly be home to dinner at half-past seven, and so on. "The times" expects a great deal for its money, and does not even allow one to keep the small change of civility.'

Lady Cantourne was blotting vigorously.

'I admit,' she answered, 'that the reaction is rather strong; reactions are always stronger than they intend to be. In our

early days the formalities were made too much of: now they are——

‘Made into a social hash,’ he suggested, when she paused for a word, ‘where the prevailing flavour is the common onion of commerce! Now, I’ll wager any sum that that is an invitation to someone you do not care a screw about.’

‘It is. But, Sir John, the hash must be kept moving; cold hash is not palatable. I will tell you at once, I am inviting young Semoor to fill the vacancy caused by Mr. Oscard’s departure.’

‘Ah! Mr. Oscard proposes depriving us of his—society.’

‘He leaves to-morrow. He only came to say good-bye.’

‘He moves on—to some other hostelry?’

‘No! He is going to——’

She paused, so that Sir John was forced to turn in courteous inquiry and look her in the face.

‘Africa!’ she added sharply, never taking her bright eyes from his face.

She saw the twitching of the aged lips before his hand got there to hide them. She saw his eyes fall before her steady gaze, and she pitied him while she admired his uncompromising pride.

‘Indeed!’ he said. ‘I have reason to believe,’ he added, turning to the window again, ‘that there is a great future before that country; all the intellect of Great Britain seems to be converging in its direction.’

Since his departure Jack’s name had never been mentioned, even between these two whose friendship dated back a generation. Once or twice Sir John had made a subtle passing reference to him, such as perhaps no other woman but Lady Cantourne could have understood; but Africa was, so to speak, blotted out of Sir John Meredith’s map of the world. It was there that he kept his skeleton—the son who had been his greatest pride and his deepest humiliation—his highest hope in life—almost the only failure of his career.

He stood there by the window, looking out with that well-bred interest in details of sport and pastime which was part of his creed. He braved it out even before the woman who had been a better friend to him than his dead wife. Not even to her would he confess that any event of existence could reach him through the impenetrable mask he wore before the world. Not even she must know that aught in his life could breathe of failure or disappointment. As it is given to the best of women to want to take their

sorrows to another, so the strongest men instinctively deny their desire for sympathy.

Lady Cantourne, pretending to select another sheet of note-paper, glanced at him with a pathetic little smile. Although they had never been anything to each other, these two people had passed through many of the trials to which humanity is heir almost side by side. But neither had ever broken down. Each acted as a sort of mental tonic on the other. They had tacitly agreed, years before, to laugh at most things. She saw, more distinctly than any, the singular emptiness of his clothes, as if the man was shrinking, and she knew that the emptiness was of the heart.

Sir John Meredith had taught his son that Self and Self alone reigns in the world. He had taught him that the thing called Love, with a capital L, is nearly all self, and that it finally dies in the arms of Self. He had told him that a father's love, or a son's, or a mother's, is merely a matter of convenience, and vanishes when Self asserts itself.

Upon this principle they were both acting now, with a strikingly suggestive similarity of method. Neither was willing to admit to the world in general, and to the other in particular, that a cynical theory could possibly be erroneous.

'I am sorry that our young friend is going to leave us,' said Sir John, taking up and unfolding the morning paper. 'He is honest and candid, if he is nothing else.'

This meant that Guy Osgard's admiration for Millicent Chyne had never been concealed for a moment, and Lady Cantourne knew it.

'He interests me,' went on the old aristocrat, studying the newspaper; and his hearer knew the inner significance of the remark.

At times she was secretly ashamed of her niece, but that *esprit de corps* which binds women together prompted her always to defend Millicent. The only defence at the moment was silence, and an assumed density which did not deceive Sir John—even she could not do that.

In the meantime Miss Millicent Chyne was walking on the sea-wall at the end of the garden with Guy Osgard. One of the necessary acquirements of a modern educational outfit is the power of looking perfectly at home in a score of different costumes during the year, and, needless to say, Miss Chyne was perfectly finished in this art. The manner in which she wore her sailor-hat, her blue

serge, and her neat brown shoes conveyed to the onlooker, and especially the male of that species (we cannot in conscience call them observers), the impression that she was a yachtswoman born and bred. Her delicate complexion was enhanced by the faintest suspicion of sunburn and a few exceedingly becoming freckles. There was a freedom in her movements which had not been observable in London drawing-rooms. This was Diana-like and in perfect keeping with the dainty sailor outfit; moreover, nine men out of ten would fail to attribute the difference to sundry cunning strings within the (London) skirt.

‘It is sad,’ Millicent was saying, ‘to think that we shall have no more chances of sailing. The wind has quite dropped, that horrid tide is running, and—this is your last day.’

She ended with a little laugh, knowing full well that there was little sentiment in the big man by her side.

‘Really,’ she went on, ‘I think I should be able to manage a boat in time, don’t you think so? Please encourage me. I am sure I have tried to learn.’

But he remained persistently grave. She did not like that gravity; she had met it before in the course of her experiments. One of the grievances harboured by Miss Millicent Chyne against the opposite sex was that they could not settle down into a harmless, honest flirtation. Of course, this could be nothing but a flirtation of the lightest and most evanescent description. She was engaged to Jack Meredith—poor Jack, who was working for her, ever so hard, somewhere near the Equator—and if Guy Osgard did not know this he had only himself to blame. There were plenty of people ready to tell him. He had only to ask.

Millicent Chyne, like Guy, was hampered at the outset of life by theories upon it. Experience, the fashionable novel, and modern cynicism had taught her to expect little from human nature—a dangerous lesson, for it eases responsibility, and responsibility is the ten commandments rolled into a compact whole, suitable for the pocket.

She expected of no man—not even of Jack—that perfect faithfulness in every word and thought which is read of in books. And it is one of the theories of the day that what one does not expect one is not called upon to give. Jack, she reflected, was too much a man of the world to expect her to sit and mope alone. She was apparently incapable of seeing the difference between that pastime and sitting on the sea-wall behind a large flowering currant-tree

with a man who did not pretend to hide the fact that he was in love with her. Some women are thus.

'I do not know if you have learnt much,' he answered. 'But I have.'

'What have you learnt?' she asked in a low voice, half-fascinated by the danger into which she knew that she was running.

'That I love you,' he answered, standing squarely in front of her, and announcing the fact with a deliberate honesty which was rather startling. 'I was not sure of it before, so I stayed away from you for three weeks; but now I know for certain.'

'Oh, you mustn't say that!'

She rose hastily and turned away from him. There was in her heart a sudden feeling of regret. It was the feeling that the keenest sportsman sometimes has when some majestic monarch of the forest falls before his merciless rifle—a sudden passing desire that it might be undone.

'Why not?' he asked. He was desperately in earnest, and that which made him a good sportsman—an unmatched big game hunter, calm and self-possessed in any strait—gave him a strange deliberation now, which Millicent Chyne could not understand. 'Why not?'

'I do not know—because you mustn't.'

And in her heart she wanted him to say it again.

'I am not ashamed of it,' he said, 'and I do not see why I should not say it to you—or to anyone else, so far as that goes.'

'No, never!' she cried, really frightened. 'To me it does not matter' so much. But to no one else—no, never! Aunt Marian must not know it—nor Sir John.'

'I cannot see that it is any business of Sir John's. Of course, Lady Cantourne would have liked you to marry a title; but if you cared for me she would be ready to listen to reason.'

In which judgment of the good lady he was no doubt right—especially if reason spoke with the voice of three thousand pounds per annum.

'Do you care for me?' he asked, coming a little closer.

There was a whole world of gratified vanity and ungratified curiosity for her in the presence of this strong man at her elbow. It was one of the supreme triumphs of her life, because he was different from the rest. He was for her, what his first tiger had been for him. The danger that he might come still nearer had for her a sense of keen pleasure. She was thoroughly enjoying

herself, and the nearest approach that men can experience to the joy that was hers is the joy of battle.

‘I cannot answer that—not now.’

And the little half-shrinking glance over her shoulder was a low-minded, unmaidenly invitation. But he was in earnest, and he was, above all, a gentleman. He stood his ground a yard away from her.

‘Then when,’ he asked,—‘when will you answer me?’

She stood with her back turned towards him, looking out over the smooth waters of the Solent, where one or two yachts and a heavy black schooner were creeping up on the tide before the morning breeze. She drummed reflectively with her fingers on the low stone wall. Beneath them a few gulls whirled and screamed over a shoal of little fish. One of the birds had a singular cry, as if it were laughing to itself.

‘You said just now,’ Millicent answered at length, ‘that you were not sure yourself—not at first—and, therefore, you cannot expect me to know all at once.’

‘You would know at once,’ he argued gravely, ‘if it was going to be no. If you do not say no now, I can only think that it may be yes some day. And—’ he came closer—he took the hand that hung at her side—conveniently near—‘and I don’t want you to say no now. Don’t say no! I will wait as long as you like for yes. Millicent, I would rather go on waiting and thinking that it is going to be yes, even if it is no after all.’

She said nothing, but she left her hand in his.

‘May I go on thinking that it will be yes until I come back?’

‘I cannot prevent your thinking, can I?’ she whispered with a tender look in her eyes.

‘And may I write to you?’

She shook her head.

‘Well—l—l—— Now and then,’ he pleaded. ‘Not often. Just to remind you of my existence.’

She gave a little laugh, which he liked exceedingly and remembered afterwards.

‘If you like,’ she answered.

At this moment Lady Cantourne’s voice was heard in the distance, calling them.

‘There!’ exclaimed Millicent. ‘We must go at once. And no one—no one, mind—must know of this.’

‘No one shall know of it,’ he answered.

CHAPTER X.

LOANGO.

Faithful and hopeful, wise in charity,
Strong in grave peace, in pity circumspect.

THOSE who for their sins have been to Loango will scarcely care to have its beauties recalled to memory. And to such as have not yet visited the spot one can only earnestly recommend a careful avoidance.

Suffice it to say, therefore, that there is such a place, and the curious may find it marked in larger type than it deserves on the map of Africa, on the West Coast of that country, and within an inch or so of the Equator.

Loango has a bar, and outside of that mysterious and somewhat suggestive nautical hindrance the coasting steamers anchor, while the smaller local fry find harbour nearer to the land. The passenger is not recommended to go ashore—indeed, many difficulties are placed in his way, and he usually stays on board while the steamer receives or discharges a scanty cargo, rolling ceaselessly in the Atlantic swell. The roar of the surf may be heard, and at times some weird cry or song. There is nothing to tempt even the most adventurous through that surf. A moderately large white building attracts the eye, and usually brings upon itself a contemptuous stare, for it seems to be the town of Loango, marked so bravely on the map. As a matter of fact the town is five miles inland, and the white building is only a factory or trading establishment.

Loango is the reverse of cheerful. To begin with, it is usually raining there. The roar of the surf—than which there are few sadder sounds on earth—fills the atmosphere with a never-ceasing melancholy. The country is over-wooded; the tropical vegetation, the huge tangled African trees stand almost in the surf; and inland the red serrated hills mount guard in gloomy array. For Europeans this country is accursed. From the mysterious forest-land there creeps down a subtle, tainted air that poisons the white man's blood, and either strikes him down in a fever or terrifies him by strange unknown symptoms and sudden disfiguring disease. The Almighty speaks very plainly sometimes and in some

places—nowhere more plainly than on the West Coast of Africa, which land He evidently wants for the black man. We, of the fairer skin, have Australia now; we are taking America, we are dominant in Asia; but somehow we don't get on in Africa. The Umpire is there, and He insists on fair play.

'This is not cheery,' Jack Meredith observed to his servant as they found themselves deposited on the beach within a stone's throw of the French factory.

'No, sir, not cheery, sir,' replied Joseph. He was very busy attending to the landing of their personal effects, and had only time to be respectful. It was Joseph's way to do only one thing at a time, on the principle, no doubt, that enough for the moment is the evil thereof. His manner implied that, when those coloured gentlemen had got the baggage safely conveyed out of the boats on to the beach, it would be time enough to think about Loango.

Moreover, Joseph was in his way rather a dauntless person. He held that there were few difficulties which he and his master, each in his respective capacity, were unable to meet. This African mode of life was certainly not one for which he had bargained when taking service; but he rather enjoyed it than otherwise, and he was consoled by the reflection that what was good enough for his master was good enough for him. Beneath the impenetrable mask of a dignified servitude he knew that this was 'all along of that Chyne girl,' and rightly conjectured that it would not last for ever. He had an immense respect for Sir John, whom he tersely described as a 'game one,' but his knowledge of the world went towards the supposition that headstrong age would finally bow before headstrong youth. He did not, however, devote much consideration to these matters, being a young man, although an old soldier, and taking a lively interest in the present.

It had been arranged by letter that Jack Meredith should put up, as his host expressed it, at the small bungalow occupied by Maurice Gordon and his sister. Gordon was the local head of a large trading association somewhat after the style of the old East India Company, and his duties partook more of the glory of a governor than of the routine of a trader.

Of Maurice Gordon's past Meredith knew nothing beyond the fact that they were schoolfellows strangely brought together again on the deck of a coasting steamer. Maurice Gordon was not a reserved person, and it was rather from a lack of opportunity than from an excess of caution that he allowed his new-found friend to

go up the Ogowe river, knowing so little of himself, Maurice Gordon of Loango.

There were plenty of willing guides and porters on the beach ; for in this part of Africa there is no such thing as continued and methodical labour. The entire population considers the lilies of the fields to obvious purpose.

Joseph presently organised a considerable portion of this population into a procession, headed triumphantly by an old white-woolled negro whose son cleaned Maurice Gordon's boots. This man Joseph selected—not without one or two jokes of a somewhat personal nature—as a fitting guide to the Gordons' house. As they neared the little settlement on the outskirts of the black-town where the mission and other European residences are situated, the veteran guide sent on couriers to announce the arrival of the great gentleman, who had for body-servant the father of laughter.

On finally reaching the bungalow Meredith was pleasantly surprised. It was pretty and homelike—surrounded by a garden wherein grew a strange profusion of homely English vegetables and tropical flowers.

Joseph happened to be in front, and, as he neared the verandah, he suddenly stopped at the salute ; moreover, he began to wonder in which trunk he had packed his master's dress-clothes.

An English lady was coming out of the drawing-room window to meet the travellers—a lady whose presence diffused that sense of refinement and peace into the atmosphere which has done as much towards the expansion of our piecemeal empire as ever did the strong right arm of Thomas Atkins. It is because—sooner or later—these ladies come with us that we have learnt to mingle peace with war—to make friends of whilom enemies.

She nodded in answer to the servant's salutation, and passed on to greet the master.

'My brother has been called away suddenly,' she said. 'One of his sub-agents has been getting into trouble with the natives. Of course you are Mr. Meredith?'

'I am,' replied Jack, taking the hand she held out—it was a small white hand—small without being frail or diaphanous. 'And you are Miss Gordon, I suppose? I am sorry Gordon is away, but no doubt we shall be able to find somewhere to put up.'

'You need not do that,' she said quietly. 'This is Africa,

you know. You can quite well stay with us, although Maurice is away until to-morrow.'

'Sure?' he asked.

'Quite!' she answered.

She was tall and fair, with a certain stateliness of carriage which harmonised wonderfully with a thoughtful and pale face. She was not exactly pretty, but gracious and womanly, with honest blue eyes that looked on men and women alike. She was probably twenty-eight years of age; her manner was that of a woman rather than of a girl—of one who was in life and not on the outskirts.

'We rather pride ourselves,' she said, leading the way into the drawing-room, 'upon having the best house in Loango. You will, I think, be more comfortable here than anywhere.'

She turned and looked at him with a slow, grave smile. She was noticing that, of the men who had been in this drawing-room, none had seemed so entirely at his ease as this one.

'I must ask you to believe that I was thinking of your comfort and not of my own.'

'Yes, I know you were,' she answered. 'Our circle is rather limited, as you will find, and very few of the neighbours have time to think of their houses. Most of them are missionaries, and they are so busy; they have a large field, you see.'

'Very—and a weedy one, I should think.'

He was looking round, noting with well-trained glance the thousand little indescribable touches that make a charming room. He knew his ground. He knew the date and the meaning of every little ornament—the title and the writer of each book—the very material with which the chairs were covered; and he knew that all was good—all arranged with that art which is the difference between ignorance and knowledge.

'I see you have all the new books.'

'Yes, we have books and magazines; but, of course, we live quite out of the world.'

She paused, leaving the conversation with him as in the hands of one who knew his business.

'I,' he said, filling up the pause, 'have hitherto lived in the world—right in it. There is a lot of dust and commotion; the dust gets into people's eyes and blinds them; the commotion wears them out; and perhaps, after all, Loango is better!'

He spoke with the easy independence of the man of the world,

accustomed to feel his way in strange places—not heeding what opinion he might raise—what criticism he might brave. He was glancing round him all the while, noting things, and wondering for whose benefit this pretty room had been evolved in the heart of a savage country. Perhaps he had assimilated erroneous notions of womankind in the world of which he spoke; perhaps he had never met any of those women whose natural refinement urges them to surround themselves, even in solitude, with pretty things, and prompts them to dress as neatly and becomingly as their circumstances allow for the edification of no man.

‘I never abuse Loango,’ she answered; ‘such abuse is apt to recoil. To call a place dull is often a confession of dulness.’

He laughed—still in that somewhat unnatural manner, as if desirous of filling up time. He had spent the latter years of his life in doing nothing else. The man’s method was so different to what Jocelyn Gordon had met with in Loango, where men were all in deadly earnest, pursuing souls or wealth, that it struck her forcibly; and she remembered it long after Meredith had forgotten its use.

‘I have no idea,’ she continued, ‘how the place strikes the passing traveller; he usually passes by on the other side; but I am afraid there is nothing to arouse the smallest interest.’

‘But, Miss Gordon, I am not the passing traveller.’

She looked up with a sudden interest.

‘Indeed! I understood from Maurice that you were travelling down the coast without any particular object.’

‘I have an object—estimable, if not quite original.’

‘Yes?’

‘I want to make some money. I have never made any yet, so there is a certain novelty in the thought which is pleasant.’

She smiled with the faintest suspicion of incredulity.

‘I know what you are thinking,’ he said; ‘that I am too neat and tidy—too namby-pamby to do anything in this country. That my boots are too narrow in the toe, my hair too short and my face too clean. I cannot help it. It is the fault of the individual you saw outside—Joseph. He insists on a strict observance of the social duties.’

‘We are rougher here,’ she answered.

‘I left England,’ he explained, ‘in rather a hurry. I had no time to buy uncomfortable boots, or anything like that. I know it was wrong. The ordinary young man of society who goes

morally to the dogs and physically to the colonies always has an outfit. His friends buy him an outfit, and certain enterprising haberdashers make a study of such things. I came as I am.'

While he was speaking she had been watching him—studying him more closely than she had hitherto been able to do.

'I once met a Sir John Meredith,' she said suddenly.

'My father.'

He paused, drawing in his legs, and apparently studying the neat brown boots of which there had been question.

'Should you meet him again,' he went on, 'it would not be advisable to mention my name. He might not care to hear it. We have had a slight difference of opinion. With me it is different. I am always glad to hear about him. I have an immense respect for him.'

She listened gravely, with a sympathy that did not attempt to express itself in words. On such a short acquaintance she had not learnt to expect a certain lightness of conversational touch which he always assumed when speaking of himself, as if his own thoughts and feelings were matters for ridicule.

'Of course,' he went on, 'I was in the wrong. I know that. But it sometimes happens that a man is not in a position to admit that he is in the wrong—when, for instance, another person would suffer by such an admission.'

'Yes,' answered Jocelyn; 'I understand.'

At this moment a servant came in with lamps and proceeded to close the windows. She was quite an old woman—an English-woman—and as she placed the lamps upon the table she scrutinised the guest after the manner of a privileged servitor. When she had departed Jack Meredith continued his narrative with a sort of deliberation which was explained later on.

'And,' he said, 'that is why I came to Africa—that is why I want to make money. I do not mind confessing to a low greed of gain, because I think I have the best motive that a man can have for wanting to make money.'

He said this meaningly, and watched her face all the while.

'A motive which any lady ought to approve of.'

She smiled sympathetically.

'I approve and I admire your spirit.'

She rose as she spoke, and moved towards a side table, where two lighted candles had been placed.

'My motive for talking so barefacedly about myself,' he said,

as they moved towards the door together, 'was to let you know exactly who I am and why I am here. It was only due to you on accepting your hospitality. I might have been a criminal, or an escaped embezzler. There were two on board the steamer coming out, and several other shady characters.'

'Yes,' said the girl, 'I saw your motive.'

They were now in the hall, and the aged servant was waiting to show him his room.

CHAPTER XI.

A COMPACT.

Drifting, slow drifting down a wizard stream.

'No one knows,' Victor Durnovo was in the habit of saying, 'what is going on in the middle of Africa.'

And on this principle he acted.

'Ten miles above the camping-ground where we first met,' he had told Meredith, 'you will find a village where I have my headquarters. There is quite a respectable house there, with—a—a woman to look after your wants. When you have fixed things up at Loango, and have arranged for the dhows to meet my steamer, take up all your men to this village—Msala is the name—and send the boats back. Wait there till we come.'

In due time the telegram came, *viâ* St. Paul de Loanda, announcing the fact that Osgard had agreed to join the expedition, and that Durnovo and he might be expected at Msala in one month from that time. It was not without a vague feeling of regret that Jack Meredith read this telegram. To be at Msala in a month with forty men and a vast load of provisions meant leaving Loango almost at once. And, strange though it may seem, he had become somewhat attached to the dreary East African town. The singular cosmopolitan society was entirely new to him; the life, taken as a life, almost unique. He knew that he had not outstayed his welcome. Maurice Gordon had taken care to assure him of that in his boisterous, hearty manner, savouring more of Harrow than of Eton, every morning at breakfast.

'Confound Durnovo!' he cried, when the telegram had been read aloud. 'Confound him, with his energy and his business-like habits! That means that you will have to leave us before long; and somehow it has got to be quite natural to see you come

lounging in ten minutes late for most things, with an apology for Jocelyn, but none for me. We shall miss you, old chap.'

'Yes,' added Jocelyn, 'we shall.'

She was busy with the cups and spoke rather indifferently.

'So you've got Oscar?' continued Maurice. 'I imagine he is a good man—tip-top shot and all that. I've never met him, but I have heard of him.'

'He is a gentleman at all events,' said Meredith quietly; 'I know that.'

Jocelyn was looking at him between the hibiscus flowers decorating the table.

'Is Mr. Durnovo going to be leader of the expedition?' she inquired casually, after a few moments' silence; and Jack, looking up with a queer smile, met her glance for a moment.

'No,' he answered.

Maurice Gordon's hearty laugh interrupted.

'Ha, ha!' he cried. 'I wonder where the dickens you men are going to?'

'Up the Ogowe river,' replied Jack.

'No doubt. But what for? There is something mysterious about that river. Durnovo keeps his poor relations there, or something of that kind.'

'We are not going to look for them.'

'I suppose,' said Maurice, helping himself to marmalade, 'that he has dropped upon some large deposit of ivory; that will turn out to be the solution of the mystery. It is the solution of most mysteries in this country. I wish I could solve the mysteries of ways and means and drop upon a large deposit of ivory, or spice or precious stones. We should soon be out of this country, should we not, old girl?'

'I do not think we have much to complain of,' answered Jocelyn.

'No; you never do. Moreover, I do not suppose you would do so if you had the excuse.'

'Oh yes, I should, if I thought it would do any good.'

'Ah!' put in Meredith. 'There speaks Philosophy—jam, please.'

'Or resignation—that is strawberry and this is black currant.'

'Thanks, black currant. No—Philosophy. Resignation is the most loathsome of the virtues.'

'I can't say I care for any of them very much,' put in Maurice.

'No; I thought you seemed to shun them,' said Jack like a flash.

'Sharp! very sharp! Jocelyn, do you know what we called him at school?—the French nail; he was so very long and thin and sharp! I might add polished and strong, but we were not so polite in those days. Poor old Jack! he gave as good as he got. But I must be off—the commerce of Eastern Africa awaits me. You'll be round at the office presently, I suppose, Jack?'

'Yes; I have an appointment there with a coloured person who is a liar by nature and a cook by trade.'

Maurice Gordon usually went off like this—at a moment's notice. He was one of those loud-speaking, quick-actioned men, who often get a reputation for energy and capacity without fully deserving it.

Jack, of a more meditative habit, rarely followed his host with the same obvious haste. He finished his breakfast calmly, and then asked Jocelyn whether she was coming out on to the verandah. It was a habit they had unconsciously dropped into. The verandah was a very important feature of the house, thickly overhung as it was with palms, bananas, and other tropical verdure. Africa is the land of creepers, and all around this verandah, over the trellis-work, around the supports, hanging in festoons from the roof, were a thousand different creeping flowers. The legend of the house—for, as in India, almost every bungalow on the West Coast has its tale—was that one of the early missionaries had built it, and, to beguile the long months of the rainy season had carefully collected these creepers to beautify the place against the arrival of his young wife. She never came. A telegram stopped her. A snake interrupted his labour of love.

Jack took a seat at once, and began to search for his cigar-case in the pocket of his jacket. In this land of flies and moths, men need not ask permission before they smoke. Jocelyn did not sit down at once. She went to the front of the verandah and watched her brother mount his horse. She was a year older than Maurice Gordon, and exercised a larger influence over his life than either of them suspected.

Presently he rode past the verandah, waving his hand cheerily. He was one of those large hearty Englishmen who seem to be all appetite and laughter—men who may be said to be manly, and beyond that nothing. Their manliness is so overpowering that it swallows up many other qualities which are not out of place in

men, such as tact and thoughtfulness, and *perhaps* intellectuality and the power to take some interest in those gentler things that interest women.

When Jocelyn came to the back of the verandah she was thinking about her brother Maurice, and it never suggested itself to her that she should not speak her thoughts to Meredith, whom she had not seen until three weeks ago. She had never spoken of Maurice behind his back to any man before.

'Does it ever strike you,' she said, 'that Maurice is the sort of man to be led astray by evil influence?'

'Yes; or to be led straight by a good influence, such as yours.'

He did not meet her thoughtful gaze. He was apparently watching the retreating form of the horse through the tangle of flower and leaf and tendril.

'I am afraid,' said the girl, 'that my influence is not of much account.'

'Do you really believe that?' asked Meredith, turning upon her with a half-cynical smile.

'Yes,' she answered simply.

Before speaking again he took a pull at his cigar.

'Your influence,' he said, 'appears to me to be the making of Maurice Gordon. I frequently see serious flaws in the policy of Providence; but I suppose there is wisdom in making the strongest influence that which is unconscious of its power.'

'I am glad you think I have some power over him,' said Jocelyn; 'but, at the same time, it makes me uneasy, because it only confirms my conviction that he is very easily led. And suppose my influence—such as it is—was withdrawn? Suppose that I were to die, or, what appears to be more likely, suppose that he should marry?'

'Then let us hope that he will marry the right person. People sometimes do, you know.'

She smiled with a strange little flicker of the eyelids. They had grown wonderfully accustomed to each other during the last three weeks. Here, it would appear, was one of those friendships between man and woman that occasionally set the world agog with curiosity and scepticism. But there seemed to be no doubt about it. He was over thirty, she verging on that prosaic age. Both had lived and moved in the world; to both life was an open book, and they had probably discovered, as most of us do, that the

larger number of the leaves are blank. He had almost told her that he was engaged to be married, and she had quite understood. There could not possibly be any misapprehension; there was no room for one of those little mistakes about which people write novels and fondly hope that some youthful reader may be carried away by a very faint resemblance to that which they hold to be life. Moreover, at thirty, one leaves the first romance of youth behind.

There was something in her smile that suggested that she did not quite believe in his cynicism.

'Also,' she said gravely, 'some stronger influence might appear—an influence which I could not counteract.'

Jack Meredith turned in his long chair and looked at her searchingly.

'I have a vague idea,' he said, 'that you are thinking of Durnovo.'

'I am,' she admitted with some surprise. 'I wonder how you knew? I am afraid of him.'

'I can reassure you on that score,' said Meredith. 'For the next two years or so Durnovo will be in daily intercourse with me. He will be under my immediate eye. I did not anticipate much pleasure from his society, but now I do.'

'Why?' she asked, rather mystified.

'Because I shall have the daily satisfaction of knowing that I am relieving you of an anxiety.'

'It is very kind of you to put it in that way,' said Jocelyn. 'But I should not like you to sacrifice yourself to what may be a foolish prejudice on my part.'

'It is not a foolish prejudice. Durnovo is not a gentleman either by birth or inclination. He is not fit to associate with you.'

To this Jocelyn answered nothing. Victor Durnovo was one of her brother's closest friends—a friend of his own choosing.

'Miss Gordon,' said Jack Meredith suddenly, with a gravity that was rare, 'will you do me a favour?'

'I think I should like to.'

'You admit that you are afraid of Durnovo now: if at any time you have reason to be more afraid, will you make use of me? Will you write or come to me and ask my help?'

'Thank you,' she said, hesitatingly.

'You see,' he went on in a lighter tone, 'I am not afraid of

Durnovo. I have met Durnovos before. You may have observed that my locks no longer resemble the raven's wing. There is a little grey—just here—above the temple. I am getting on in life, and I know how to deal with Durnovos.'

'Thank you,' said the girl, with a little sigh of relief. 'The feeling that I have someone to turn to will be a great relief. You see how I am placed here. The missionaries are very kind and well-meaning, but there are some things which they do not quite understand. They may be gentlemen—some of them are; but they are not men of the world. I have no definite thought or fear, and very good persons, one finds, are occasionally a little dense. Unless things are very definite, they do not understand.'

'On the other hand,' pursued Jack in the same reflective tone, as if taking up her thought, 'persons who are not good have a perception of the indefinite. I did not think of it in that light before.'

Jocelyn Gordon laughed softly, without attempting to meet his lighter vein.

'Do you know,' she said, after a little silence, 'that I was actually thinking of warning you against Mr. Durnovo? Now I stand aghast at my own presumption.'

'It was kind of you to give the matter any thought whatever.'

He rose and threw away the end of his cigar. Joseph was already before the door, leading the horse which Maurice Gordon had placed at his visitor's disposal.

'I will lay the warning to heart,' he said, standing in front of Jocelyn, and looking down at her as she lay back in the deep basket-chair. She was simply dressed in white—as was her wont, for it must be remembered that they were beneath the Equator—a fair English maiden, whose thoughts were hidden behind a certain gracious, impenetrable reserve. 'I will lay it to heart, although you have not uttered it. But I have always known with what sort of man I was dealing. We serve each other's purpose, that is all; and he knows that as well as I do.'

'I am glad Mr. Osgard is going with you,' she answered guardedly.

He waited a moment. It seemed as if she had not done speaking—as if there was another thought near the surface. But she did not give voice to it and he turned away. The sound of the horse's feet on the gravel did not arouse her from a reverie into which she had fallen; and long after it had died away, leaving

only the hum of insect life and the distant ceaseless song of the surf, Jocelyn Gordon sat apparently watching the dancing shadows on the floor as the creepers waved in the breeze.

CHAPTER XII.

A MEETING.

No one can be more wise than destiny.

THE short equatorial twilight was drawing to an end, and all Nature stood in silence, while Night crept up to claim the land where her reign is more autocratic than elsewhere on earth. There is a black night above the trees, and a blacker beneath. In an hour it would be dark, and, in the meantime, the lowering clouds were tinged with a pink glow that filtered through from above. There was rain coming, and probably thunder. Moreover, the trees seemed to know it, for there was a limpness in their attitude, as if they were tucking their heads into their shoulders in anticipation of the worst. The insects were certainly possessed of a premonition. They had crept away.

It was distinctly an unlikely evening for the sportsman. The stillness was so complete that the faintest rustle could be heard at a great distance. Moreover, it was the sort of evening when Nature herself seems to be glancing over her shoulder with timorous restlessness.

Nevertheless, a sportsman was abroad. He was creeping up the right-hand bank of a stream, his only chance lying in the noise of the waters which might serve to deaden the sound of broken twig or rustling leaf.

This sportsman was Jack Meredith, and it was evident that he was bringing to bear upon the matter in hand that intelligence and keenness of perception which had made him a person of some prominence in other scenes where Nature has a less assured place.

It would appear that he was not so much at home in the tangle of an African forest as in the crooked paths of London society; for his clothes were torn in more than one place; a mosquito, done to sudden death, adhered sanguinarily to the side of his aristocratic nose, while heat and mental distress had drawn damp stripes down his countenance. His hands were scratched and inclined to bleed, and one leg had apparently been in a

morass. Added to these physical drawbacks there was no visible sign of success, which was probably the worst part of Jack Meredith's plight.

Since sunset he had been crawling, scrambling, stumbling up the bank of this stream in relentless pursuit of some large animal which persistently kept hidden in the tangle across the bed of the river. The strange part of it was that when he stopped to peep through the branches the animal stopped too, and he found no way of discovering its whereabouts. More than once they stopped thus for nearly five minutes, peering at each other through the heavy leafage. It was distinctly unpleasant, for Meredith felt that the animal was not afraid of him, and did not fully understand the situation. The respective positions of hunter and hunted were imperfectly defined. He had hitherto confined his attentions to such game as showed a sporting readiness to run away, and there was a striking novelty in this unseen beast of the forest, fresh, as it were, from the hands of its Creator, that entered into the fun of the thing from a totally mistaken standpoint.

Once Meredith was able to decide approximately the whereabouts of his prey by the momentary shaking of a twig. He raised his rifle and covered that twig steadily; his forefinger played tentatively on the trigger, but on second thoughts he refrained. He was keenly conscious of the fact that the beast was doing its work with skill superior to his own. In comparison to his, its movements were almost noiseless. Jack Meredith was too clever a man to be conceited in the wrong place, which is the habit of fools. He recognised very plainly that he was not distinguishing himself in this new field of glory; he was not yet an accomplished big-game hunter.

Twice he raised his rifle with the intention of firing at random into the underwood on the remote chance of bringing his enemy into the open. But the fascination of this duel of cunning was too strong, and he crept onwards with bated breath.

It was terrifically hot, and all the while Night was stalking westward on the summits of the trees with stealthy tread.

While absorbed in the intricacies of pursuit—while anathematising tendrils and condemning thorns to summary judgment—Jack Meredith was not losing sight of his chance of getting back to the little village of Msala. He knew that he had only to follow the course of the stream downwards, retracing his steps until a junction with the Ogowe river was effected. In the meantime

his lips were parted breathlessly, and there was a light in the quiet eyes which might have startled some of his well-bred friends could they have seen it.

At last he came to an open space made by a slip of the land into the bed of the river. When Jack Meredith came to this he stepped out of the thicket and stood in the open, awaiting the approach of his stealthy prey. The sound of its footfall was just perceptible, slowly diminishing the distance that divided them. Then the trees were parted, and a tall, fair man stepped forward on to the opposite bank.

Jack Meredith bowed gravely, and the other sportsman, seeing the absurdity of the situation, burst into hearty laughter. In a moment or two he had leapt from rock to rock and come to Meredith.

'It seems,' he said, 'that we have been wasting a considerable amount of time.'

'I very nearly wasted powder and shot,' replied Jack, significantly indicating his rifle.

'I saw you twice, and raised my rifle; your breeches are just the colour of a young doe. Are you Meredith? My name is Oscar.'

'Ah! Yes, I am Meredith. I am glad to see you.'

They shook hands. There was a twinkle in Jack Meredith's eyes, but Oscar was quite grave. His sense of humour was not very keen, and he was before all things a sportsman.

'I left the canoes a mile below Msala and landed to shoot a deer we saw drinking, but I never saw him. Then I heard you, and I have been stalking you ever since.'

'But I never expected you so soon; you were not due till—look!' Jack whispered suddenly.

Oscar turned on his heel, and the next instant their two rifles rang out through the forest stillness in one sharp crack. Across the stream, ten yards behind the spot where Oscar had emerged from the brush, a leopard sprang into the air, five feet from the ground, with head thrown back and paws clawing at the thinness of space with grand free sweeps. The beast fell with a thud and lay still—dead.

The two men clambered across the rocks again, side by side. While they stood over the prostrate form of the leopard—beautiful, incomparably graceful and sleek even in death—Guy Oscar stole a sidelong glance at his companion. He was a modest man, and

yet he knew that he was reckoned among the big-game hunters of the age. This man had fired as quickly as himself, and there were two small trickling holes in the animal's head.

While he was being quietly scrutinised Jack Meredith stooped down, and, taking the leopard beneath the shoulders, lifted it bodily back from the pool of blood.

'Pity to spoil the skin,' he explained, as he put a fresh cartridge into his rifle.

Oscar nodded in an approving way. He knew the weight of a full-grown male leopard, all muscle and bone, and he was one of those old-fashioned persons mentioned in the Scriptures as taking a delight in a man's legs—or his arms, so long as they were strong.

'I suppose,' he said quietly, 'we had better skin him here.'

As he spoke he drew a long hunting-knife, and, slashing down a bunch of the maidenhair fern that grew like nettles around them, he wiped the blood gently, almost affectionately, from the leopard's cat-like face.

There was about these two men a strict attention to the matter in hand, a mutual and common respect for all things pertaining to sport, a quiet sense of settling down without delay to the regulation of necessary detail that promised well for any future interest they might have in common.

So these highly-educated young gentlemen turned up their sleeves and steeped themselves to the elbow in gore. Moreover, they did it with a certain technical skill and a distinct sense of enjoyment. Truly, the modern English gentleman is a strange being. There is nothing his soul takes so much delight in as the process of getting hot and very dirty, and, if convenient, somewhat sanguinary. You cannot educate the manliness out of him, try as you will; and for such blessings let us in all humbleness give thanks to Heaven.

This was the bringing together of Jack Meredith and Guy Oscar—two men who loved the same woman. They knelt side by side, and Jack Meredith—the older man, the accomplished, gifted gentleman of the world, who stood second to none in that varied knowledge required nowadays of the successful sociitarian—Jack Meredith, be it noted, humbly dragged the skin away from the body while Guy Oscar cut the clinging integuments with a delicate touch and finished skill.

They laid the skin out on the trampled maidenhair and contemplated it with silent satisfaction. In the course of their

inspection they both arrived at the head at the same moment. The two holes in the hide, just above the eyes, came under their notice at the same moment, and they turned and smiled gravely at each other, thinking the same thought—the sort of thought that Englishmen rarely put into intelligible English.

‘I’m glad we did that,’ said Guy Oscar at length; suddenly, ‘Whatever comes of this expedition of ours—if we fight like hell, as we probably shall, before it is finished—if we hate each other ever afterwards, that skin ought to remind us that we are much of a muchness.’

It might have been put into better English; it might almost have sounded like poetry had Guy Oscar been possessed of the poetic soul. But this, fortunately, was not his; and all that might have been said was left to the imagination of Meredith. What he really felt was that there need be no rivalry, and that he for one had no thought of such; that in the quest which they were about to undertake there need be no question of first and last; that they were merely two men, good or bad, competent or incompetent, but through all equal.

Neither of them suspected that the friendship thus strangely inaugurated at the rifle’s mouth was to run through a longer period than the few months required to reach the plateau—that it was, in fact, to extend through that long expedition over a strange country that we call Life, and that it was to stand the greatest test that friendship has to meet with here on earth.

It was almost dark when at last they turned to go, Jack Meredith carrying the skin over his shoulder and leading the way. There was no opportunity for conversation, as their progress was necessarily very difficult. Only by the prattle of the stream were they able to make sure of keeping in the right direction. Each had a thousand questions to ask the other. They were total strangers; but it is not, one finds, by conversation that men get to know each other. A common danger, a common pleasure, a common pursuit—these are the touches of nature by which men are drawn together into the kinship of mutual esteem.

Once they gained the banks of the Ogowe their progress was quicker, and by nine o’clock they reached the camp at Msala. Victor Durnovo was still at work superintending the discharge of the baggage and stores from the large trading-canoes. They heard the shouting and chattering before coming in sight of the camp, and one voice raised angrily above the others.

'Is that Durnovo's voice?' asked Meredith.

'Yes,' answered his companion curtly.

It was a new voice, which Meredith had not heard before. When they shouted to announce their arrival it was suddenly hushed, and presently Durnovo came forward to greet them.

Meredith hardly knew him, he was so much stronger and healthier in appearance. Durnovo shook hands heartily.

'No need to introduce you two,' he said, looking from one to the other.

'No; after one mistake we discovered each other's identity in the forest,' answered Meredith.

Durnovo smiled; but there was something behind the smile. He did not seem to approve of their meeting without his intervention.

(To be continued.)

A NEW RIVER.

THE Thames, between Oxford and London, acts as a kind of safety-valve to the cramped life of the poor cockney,—to say nothing of 'all sorts and conditions of men' besides. Here dukes have their country seats, millionaires their luxurious steam-launches and house-boats, boating men their outriggers, steady-going citizens their 'tubs,' and 'Arry his canoe and his banjo. But London is so enormous that her avenues of pleasure are becoming blocked. Surbiton, Kingston, Richmond, already nearly joined to the metropolis, present, on bank-holidays, a seething mass of humanity; while at Maidenhead, Cookham, or Pangbourne the crowd is hardly less. We sigh for the desert in vain; we cannot get away from our fellow-creatures. 'Oh for "a new river!"' is the universal cry. Well, if we only knew it, we *have* a new river as silent, as secluded, to all intents and purposes, as a South American forest stream, or a Californian creek. People do not always know or appreciate what lies nearest to them; and this 'new river' is at an easy distance, for the jaded Londoner can reach it in only one hour and a half from Paddington. An hour and a quarter's train, and then ten minutes' drive, will land you in Port Meadow, Oxford, on the shores of the 'Upper River,' as the undergraduates call it. At Godstow, supposing it to be a bank-holiday, you may find several contingents of young men and maidens quaffing cider-cup through straws, or demolishing strawberries and cream in the pretty inn garden, down the backwater; at Wytham Woods you may come up with a few picnic parties browsing on the banks; but an hour or two's further rowing will land you in undreamed-of solitudes, such as would have satisfied St. Jerome and St. Francis themselves, and, certainly, such as in your wildest aspirations you never dared to hope for. The hum of the city fades from your memory; in an incredibly short time you seem entirely to belong to your new surroundings, to live the life of nature. Mild-eyed oxen gaze at you fearlessly from the river-brink as your boat glides by; moles scurry into their holes as you approach; the shrill note of the corncrake greets your ear; water-rats swim gracefully across the stream, and fishes jump at the unwonted splash of your oar-blade. It is surely marvellous

that even on a bank-holiday in the short space of a few hours we can attain to this seclusion ; so marvellous is it, that luckily the world in general does not believe it, else would the marvel soon be at an end ; and tourist bands of singing and shouting 'Arries' would desecrate these solitudes, as they have already desecrated Medmenham and Mapledurham.

Here, then, you may lie at ease in your boat and dream, congratulating yourself, meanwhile, that you are not as other men are. In this Pharisaical spirit, it may amuse you to think of 'your own green door on Campden Hill,' where bands and organs are doubtless braying. With a small boat, a picnic basket, a minimum of luggage, a copy of Matthew Arnold—perhaps a kodak, and, supposing you to be of a sociable disposition—at most one companion—the gods themselves cannot envy you. Holidays are charming all through the summer ; but let us suppose, in this case, that the holiday be taken at Whitsuntide, and that the weather be fine (after recent experience, no one will doubt this latter possibility). The river at Whitsuntide is fullest of water—no slight gain in the case of a voyage between Oxford and Cricklade ; the flowers are at their best, the trees in all their early 'pavilions of tender green,' and the meadows in all the splendour and fragrance of May. Cowslips carpet the river-banks sloping from Wytham Woods ; primroses and hyacinths nestle under the trees ; slender fritillaries, buttercups, and ox-eyed daisies dot the 'happy fields,' and kingcups alternate with the yellow iris among the scented rushes of the shore. Water-lilies and fragrant river-weeds, extending half across the stream, may indeed obstruct your boat ; but this, if it occasions a little trouble, adds to the charm of solitude, and makes you feel more than ever—as if exploring an undiscovered country.

Godstow, King's Weir, Wytham, are soon passed, and with them the last signs of bank-holiday revellers. After Eynsham Bridge—a solid, not a beautiful structure—the real charm begins. It is curious to notice in this connection how the only signs of life, the only human beings you come across in your wanderings, are invariably to be found looking over a bridge. It reminds one of the child's early drawings. Tell him to draw a bridge, it is never a bridge to him until he has placed a man on it—ergo, to the rustic, a bridge is not so much a bridge as a place for a man to stand on and from which to survey the world at large. The average rustic seems to spend all his holiday-time in this enthralling occupation.

To him a bridge seems to be a scene of wild dissipation. Bridges, however, are comparatively scarce on the Upper Thames, which may perhaps account for their popularity.

But the Oxfordshire rustic, on the rare occasions when you do come across him (apart from bridges), in no wise interferes with your solitude. He distracts you no more than the ruminating oxen who gaze on you so plaintively as you glide past them. He has become incorporated with his surroundings—'rolled round,' so to speak, 'in earth's diurnal force,' and it has crushed all power of expression out of him. All the 'joy of life' he knows is either boozing at the Pig and Whistle, or enjoying a short clay pipe on a bridge. On one occasion above Eynsham, one of these rustics was, as usual, on the bridge, when an upset occurred in a boat passing underneath it. The youthful scullers had been changing places in mid-stream—always a rash thing to do, and especially so when the boat is outriggered. The stream happened to be deep at this particular place, and enclosed between high mud banks, sparsely covered by dry reeds. These reeds snapped when grasped, like tinder, and it accordingly took the submerged ones some time to extricate themselves from their difficulties. But the man on the bridge did not budge an inch. When at last one of the sufferers, impelled thereto by an imperative desire for dry clothes, went up to him and accosted him, he slowly removed his pipe :

'There wus a young man,' he said, 'drowned in this very place six weeks ago to-day, and they ain't found 'is body yet.'

Above Eynsham is Pinkhill Lock, with many windings just below it, culminating in a shallow rapid, not always very easy to pass when the stream is low. But of late years much has been done by the Thames Conservancy towards clearing the stream and the tow-path in difficult places. The ferry rope which crosses

the stripling Thames at Bablock Hythe

must be ducked for, unless you would first stop and refresh yourself at the little red-brick inn, the Chequers, close by. From here, if you wish, you can walk to Stanton Harcourt, a curious and interesting old manor-house of the twelfth century, where the civil gardener is always ready to show you round. Of the few present remains of the old house, the most curious is the ancient and solitary tower surmounting the chapel, with a tiny winding staircase leading up to the so-called 'library,' where, it is said, the

poet Pope translated Homer's 'Iliad.' If the poet Pope ever really did climb those breakneck stairs, all we can say is that report must have lied about his infirmities, for in these degenerate days it is difficult for a hale person to get up them. Near by are the old kitchens, most picturesque buildings, to which the present farmhouse has been added. These kitchens are as instructive as a chapter in mediæval history. One realises, in looking at the tall, blackened, chimneyless walls, what huge joints of meat must have been devoured by our robust ancestors and their retainers, and how supremely unconscious they were of dirt!

It is a pretty walk across the meadows back to Bablock Hythe, where you might do worse than pass the night. If you feel energetic next morning you can continue your walk, on the other side of the stream, to the picturesque village of Cumnor, a mile and a half distant. But you will have to imagine the scenes in 'Kenilworth,' for Cumnor Place has now disappeared, and the tomb of Sir Anthony Forster alone remains to recall the tragedy of Amy Robsart.

About an hour above Bablock is Newbridge, one of the oldest bridges on the upper Thames. Its projecting buttresses show picturesquely from afar, with its humble little inn, the Maybush, flanking it to the right. There is often a considerable stream running through the middle arch, which, however, you must take in preference to the others, where lurk hidden stakes. Here the 'green-muffled Cumnor Hills' begin to fade away into blueness on the left, and the river-banks gain in beauty and in luxuriance. Then the scene changes—(a river journey is like a succession of transformation scenes)—to meadow land, cropped willows, and high flood-banks, till, in an hour and a half or so, you reach Duxford Ferry, one of the most picturesque spots on the river. The old thatched farm and outhouses would amply repay the painter's study. There does not seem to be a wild run on Duxford Ferry; indeed, now we think of it, we have never seen anyone use it; but then the only inhabitants we ever noticed at the farm were tribes of downy, yellow ducklings, and an amiable-looking old white horse. Now the hills recede yet more, as the country merges into the plains of Oxfordshire. If either wind or weeds should make towing the boat more advisable here you will hardly regret it, as the tow-path is a lovely vantage ground for a view, and each bend of the river discloses new beauties. The sun is getting low in the heavens,

Kissing with golden face the meadows green,

and the cows, waxing even more friendly with the approach of evening, rush in herds to the marge, and gaze at you with big, affectionate eyes. After many winds and curves through this pleasant meadow-land, you arrive at Tadpole Bridge and its good inn, the Trout, which has appeared tantalisingly in sight for half an hour at least. You cannot do better than sleep here, for the Trout is a most comfortable resting-place, and its landlady is kind and capable. Tadpole Bridge is no very remarkable structure, but it is even more occupied by sightseers than any other, which is saying a good deal. The entire population—numbering four men and two women—seems to live there, and generally a tribe of geese, too, are to be seen waddling about on it. Two miles from Tadpole is the sleepy little market town of Bampton, where there is a pretty church and vicarage, quite worth the walk thither. This recommendation is not given on the guide-book principle, and may therefore be received without suspicion. Guide-books are unanimous and indiscriminate in their wish that you by no means leave any tomb or monument within a circuit of many miles unvisited, whatever else you may have to leave out. Even 'Murray' may be said to suffer from this slightly gloomy tendency. Now, tombs, when you are on a holiday, are distinctly *not* the things you most yearn for. The average guide-book treats you very much as the child was treated, who, when it asked to go to a pantomime, was told 'No! but you may visit your grandmother's grave.' We do not purpose to recommend all the tombs in the neighbourhood.

To the healthy-minded river tourist quite as much gloom as he can stand will be supplied by the pocket edition of Matthew Arnold's poems, already spoken of. No poet, it need hardly be said, is more beautiful, more enthralling, than Matthew Arnold; but you distinctly need a cloudless day to read him on—a day when 'nothing is so dainty sweet as lovely melancholy.' On one occasion, when spending a wet day at this very Trout inn at Tadpole, we well remember being reduced to a frightful state of depression by a long afternoon of him. By five o'clock we were melted almost to tears, and had to hurry up dinner and bed as the only cure for our melancholy. No! Matthew Arnold's view of life is beautiful, but, like that of Ibsen's hero of 'Rosmersholm,' hardly exhilarating. He writes ever in a minor key. Was this the price that the author of the 'Scholar-Gipsy' had to pay for

immortality? The gods loved him, and had fashioned him to an exquisite mouthpiece of song; but alas for

The reed which grows never more again
As a reed with the reeds in the river!

Still, you may do worse than walk to the little town of Bampton, or to the summit of the low range of hills lying south of Tadpole Bridge, from whence you can see the little river winding among the meadows in a streak of silver. At Tadpole the river is really seen to be distinctly smaller, and one wonders how it can possibly be navigable for twenty miles further. Starting from the Trout early in the morning (and it is better to start early, for the summer mornings are generally the finest, and always the most delightful, part of the whole day on the river), you come, in a few minutes, to Rushy Lock, a picturesque little spot, with weir and weir-pool embosomed in trees and their flickering lights and shadows. Now the little river becomes yet narrower and reedier, the pretty white floating weed standing up thickly in places; and you wind slowly through luxuriant meadows, with plentiful bird and insect life. Bright blue dragon-flies skim the surface of the water, looking intensely blue whenever they congregate together on a water-lily leaf; the strange notes of the landrail and sand-piper are heard, while the cuckoo chirps incessantly in the meadows. There is also a curious little grey bird that invariably sits on the pointed apex of a reed or a post. Suddenly it darts forth in pursuit of fly or gnat, and having secured the prey returns to its place. Surely it must be the 'spotted fly-catcher.' Passing 'Old Man's Bridge'—a modest wooden structure—you at length come in sight of the two picturesque stone bridges of Radcot. Radcot is a very pretty village, in the midst of pastures and large trees; here the stream divides in two, passing under two bridges, to rejoin further on. Both streams are now made navigable. Radcot, with its pretty inn, its cottages, embowered in trees, its ancient buttressed bridges, its cattle standing by the river-brink, recalls the lines:

. . . dewy pastures, dewy trees,
Softer than sleep—all things in order stored,
A haunt of ancient Peace.

People do not seem to stay much at Radcot, for even on a bank-holiday its inn has a deserted look, except, perhaps, for a solitary bicyclist. A bicyclist! when one meets him, dusty and hot, scouring over a bridge on the Upper Thames, one is tempted

to re-echo Mr. Ruskin's thunders. Yet bicyclists there are, while, strange to say, boating parties are certainly not numerous at Radcot; yet it would be a very good starting-point for Cricklade, or for a few days' headquarters, and—a point which it is well to remember—there are two or three small boats to be let out on hire. After passing Radcot you approach the deserted remains of a weir, and then the river, still winding among fragrant meadow-lands, takes some wide curves, and passes the picturesque village of Eaton Hastings, with its small, grey stone, ivied church. This is the most beautiful spot of any. The little river winds in a bosky dell, shaded by tall trees on one side, while on the other the tiny village looks smilingly across sunny pastures. Here is the place for you to set up your easel; but, paint as you will, you will never paint those flickering lights, those wonderful reflections, those deep green pools. You come higher up—if you can ever tear yourself away, that is—to some shallows, where the minnows disport themselves happily, and where you must do your best not to let your boat run aground under the banks, while the little river chatters pleasantly.

In little sharps and trebles.

Here, across the meadow-land to the right, is the manor-house of Kelmscott, an old Elizabethan structure, but chiefly notable to us as being, for some years, the joint home of William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. An ideal home, indeed, for a poet; its weather-beaten grey gables rise between tall trees from behind an orchard and overgrown moat, or backwater, crossed by a plank bridge. The little boat-shed is humble, yet we look on it with reverence. What bliss it must have been to embark on a long, lovely June evening, when the nightingales sang in the copses by Eaton Hastings! No muse would surely be required to 'mould the secret gold' with all this bounty of Nature. The house itself is so lovingly described by William Morris in his 'News from Nowhere,' that we cannot forbear quoting a few lines:

'On the right hand we could see a cluster of small houses and barns, new and old, and before us a grey stone barn and a wall partly overgrown with ivy, over which a few grey gables showed. . . . The garden between the wall and the house was redolent of the June flowers, and the roses were rolling over one another with that delicious superabundance of small, well-tended gardens, which at first sight takes away all thought from the beholder save

that of beauty. The blackbirds were singing their loudest, the doves were cooing on the roof-ridge, the rooks in the high elm-trees beyond were garrulous among the young leaves, and the swifts wheeled whining about the gables. And the house itself was a fit guardian for all the beauty of this heart of summer.'

A few more picturesque bends above Kelmscott and you hear the roaring of 'Hart's Weir.' Here there is no lock, and an elderly man waits, like Charon, to assist the traveller. He pulls out the weir paddles, fastens a stout rope securely to your prow, and tugs with a will, you yourself meanwhile steering your best, till the boat-head slowly emerges on the other side of the weir, and the three or four feet of fall are safely surmounted. Hart's Weir is a pretty spot, set in flat meadow-land; from here you already catch a glimpse of the graceful spire of Lechlade church, surmounting the trees in the blue distance.

The view of Lechlade from the river is very picturesque. It looks, as you approach it, quite an important place, and indeed, with your mind reverting to such little places as Radcot, Tadpole, and the like, which boast only of three ducks and a man on a bridge, your sense of proportion may lead you to form undue expectations of what you may do or obtain there. But do not deceive yourself. The capacities of Lechlade are small. It is the very sleepest of sleepy towns. Its weekly market ought, one thinks, to wake it, if this were not such an utter impossibility. The seven sleepers would have done well to come here after Ephesus and have their nap out. The fact is, that Lechlade—though it has a station of its own and is only two hours and three-quarters from Paddington—is as much 'out of the world' as a camp in the Rockies. It is altogether off 'the main track;' and people are very like sheep in the way in which they all follow one another to the same place. Lechlade does not attract many people, therefore it does not attract any. And yet it has a lovely situation. The tall spire of the church (apostrophised by Shelley, who by the way was one of the first discoverers of our New River, as an 'aërial Pile') reflects itself in the stream like that of Abingdon below Oxford. Even on bank-holidays Lechlade does not completely wake up. On one memorable Whit-Monday we found it impossible to obtain so much as a quarter of a pound of butter there, though we sought for it carefully and (almost) with tears. Therefore we ungratefully cursed Lechlade in our hearts, and shook the dust of our feet off against it. But some

traces of the outer world there were in the shape of bicyclists, who, indeed, may have appropriated all the available butter of the community. Bicyclists are so ubiquitous. The bicycle fiend will surely be the 'Frankenstein' of the future, rushing round sharp corners and murdering helpless infants. 'Ixion! the Man on the Wheel!' Poor Lechlade, to be so old-world and forgotten, and yet so desecrated by the relentless bicyclist!

Guide-books advise you not to ascend the river beyond Lechlade, as the ten miles above it are often hardly navigable, and always more or less weedy, and also because the towing-path offers such counter-attractions as a walk. But a row up to Inglesham Round House, in the cool of the evening, will amply repay you, whether you walk on to Cricklade or not. The average guide-book, however, as we said, must not be too implicitly trusted. It is so apt to disregard the more secluded beauties—the places that are not three-starred in Baedeker—being mainly written for the whole flock of sheep, rather than for the few strayed lambs. One of these guide-books mentions the Upper Thames in the following not very eulogistic fashion:

'Although scarcely any of the scenery of the Thames above Oxford is to be mentioned in the same breath with the beauties of Nuneham, of Henley, of Marlow, or of Cliveden, there is still, &c., &c.'

This haughty comparison is an insult to our beloved stream. We will allow that the contrast between the Upper and the Lower river is somewhat that between a breezy upland meadow and a park, between nature and art. But what the guide-book omits to say is that there are no crowded locks, no yelling cockneys, no pert barmaids, no bad and expensive 'hotels,' and no picnic parties on every bank. Our lodging may be humble, our fare modest, but it is the best the people have at their command, and at any rate it is neither pretentious nor dear. Greed and swindling follow the cockney haunts, and ours is distinctly a 'new river.' But we will love it all the better for its neglect. It certainly is more delightful for that reason. Was it not after his journey up the river to Lechlade that Shelley wrote 'Alastor'? And the Spirit of Solitude still haunts the stream. Besides, to quote Morris's book again, there is a great 'charm in a very small river like this. The smallness of the scale of everything, the short reaches, and the speedy change of the banks, give one a feeling of going somewhere, of coming to

something strange, a feeling of adventure which one has not felt in bigger waters.'

But alas! our holiday is ending, and we must, however reluctantly, turn our faces homewards. Again we must see the stream widen, and

flow, softly flow, by lawn and lea,
A rivulet then a river,

as our boat slips quickly down towards Oxford. But not too quickly; we must not unduly hurry, for here, no less than on the Lower River, 'where'er you tread is haunted, holy ground.' The ruined walls of Godstow Nunnery, within which Fair Rosamond once dreamed away long enchanted days, the manor-house at Stanton Harcourt, where Pope wrote and suffered and writhed under cruel criticism, *mens curva in corpore curvo*; what tales they could tell you out of the far-distant past! Here, in the fragrant meadows of Kelmscott, Rossetti made himself sweet imageries through the livelong day; here William Morris thought out the 'Earthly Paradise,' and here he clothed his idea of a social Utopia in beautiful description. You drift down towards Oxford thoughtfully and almost sadly; the heat of the day is past, the sun sinks in bands of orange and purple behind the Cumnor hills, and the mysterious twilight comes on. But you are no longer alone. The 'shades of poets dead and gone'—all the dim memories and associations of the past—draw from out the vast solitude, and accompany you on your way. Here in the gloaming you see no shepherd boy, but a rural Pan, dipping his lazy feet among the water-reeds; and there, waiting listlessly by an osier-clump, his drooping figure melting into the evening mists, can you not see the Scholar-Gipsy himself,

trailing in his hand a withered spray
And waiting for the spark from heaven to fall?

THE FIRST ENGINEER.

HE was *not* an officer in Her Majesty's navy. 'The little gentleman in the fur coat,' whom loyal Jacobites used once to toast with such wicked effusion, is a confirmed enemy of the agricultural interest only. For earthworms, we all know, are 'the chief of his diet;' and without earthworms, as Darwin long ago showed the world, there would be no earth to speak of. The rich coating of vegetable mould upon which we rely for soil to grow our corn and our cabbages is a gift of the worms; it depends upon the ceaseless and silent industry with which those noiseless friends of man drag down into their burrows whole bushels of fallen leaves, and return them in due time to the surface of the land as finely-comminuted castings. They alone make the desert into pasture and arable. They are the great natural fertilisers. Therefore, whoever devours the worm is no friend of the farmer; and the farmer does well to catch, kill, and exterminate him. Yet I confess to a sneaking liking for the poor persecuted mole, who has made such a hard and gallant fight for life under such difficult conditions.

For the mole is to the soil what the fish is to the water. Having to earn his livelihood by ceaseless industry in an extraordinarily dense and resisting medium, he has acquired by slow degrees a relative perfection of structure which entitles him to our respectful admiration and consideration. Just reflect how hard it must be to burrow continually through the ground as a fish swims through the water—to use your paws for fins, with solid soil for medium—and you will form some idea of the difficulties the intelligent mole is called upon to contend against in his daily existence. No wonder his temper becomes a trifle short; and no wonder he is so hungry at the end of a hard day's work that a few hours without food are quite sufficient to kill him of starvation.

Moles are, in fact, the last word of the burrowing habit. A great many generations ago some ancestral shrew-mouse or undeveloped hedgehog took to hunting underground with its pointed snout for slugs and earthworms. 'Twas but a poor situation in the hierarchy of nature; yet he found it suited him; or at least he was enabled in that way to earn an honest livelihood which he

failed to procure in any more honourable or dignified position. So he accepted it pretty much as human workmen accept the post of miner or sewer-cleaner. It was better than nothing. His descendants stuck to the task their ancestor had chosen for them, and developed in time, by competition among themselves, an extraordinary series of adaptations to their peculiar functions. Generation after generation introduced successive alterations and improvements. At the present time there is not a stranger or more highly specialised mammal on earth than the mole, with every organ modified for the particular kind of work his life entails upon him.

In shape he is long but round and compact, with a body fitted to the size of his own tunnels, as a rabbit to its burrow or an earthworm to its tube. His legs are short and placed close to his sides, so as not to occupy any unnecessary space as he scuttles through his earthworks after his retreating prey. His snout is long and pointed, so as to fulfil the functions of a screw or auger in his excavations; for if you catch a mole above ground, and watch him as he buries himself, you will see that he uses his nose to make the beginnings of his tunnel, and employs it throughout in his work almost as much as he does his powerful fore-feet. But eyes would be in the way with a subterranean creature; they would always be getting full of dust and dirt, and setting up irritation, or even inflammation; so in the course of ages they have become practically obsolete. Not that the mole is quite blind, indeed, as careless observers will tell you; he still retains some faint memory of his eyes, but they are small and deeply hidden in the close thick fur. And he doesn't see much with them. He is independent of seeing. His eyes, such as they are, survive merely by virtue of hereditary use and wont, like the rudimentary tail and the pre-natal gill-slits in the human baby. The fact is, it takes a long time for any complete organ to atrophy altogether; and moles will very likely be extinguished by the march of intellect before the last trace of an eye has disappeared for ever under their closely-covered eyelids.

The hands of the mole—for hands they are rather than paws—serve as his spade and mattock. With them he clears away the mould from his path, and removes the obstructions in the way of his tunnel. They are enormously large and broad for the size of the animal, perfect paddles or shovels, developed in response to the needs of the situation. Those moles got on best and left

most offspring that dug their tunnels fastest, and so overtook the largest number of earthworms; while those perished in the attempt which were slowest in their excavations, and consequently failed to catch up the retreating quarry. 'Twas a perpetual game of devil-take-the-hindmost, and the modern mole exists as the survivor in the process.

What makes the fore-paws distinctively into hands, however, and gives them their curious, almost human aspect, is the fact that they are naked. This renders them more efficient instruments of excavation. The nails are long and strong and slightly flattened, and the whole hand turns out somewhat at an oblique angle. The fingers are moved by powerful muscles of extraordinary calibre for so small an animal; for by their aid the mole has to scurry through the solid earth almost as fast as a fish could swim through the much less resisting water. It is a wonderful sight to see him paddling away the soil on either hand with these natural oars, and to watch the rapidity, certainty, and vigour with which, like faith, he removes mountains—or, at any rate, mole-hills.

But if his hands are gloveless, the remainder of his body is remarkably well covered. Living underground, as the mole habitually does, it is clear at once to a thoughtful mind like the reader's that the pores of his skin would get terribly clogged with dust and dirt had not his ancestors unconsciously devised some good means of preventing it. This they did by the usual simple but somewhat cruel method of survival of the fittest. The closest furred moles kept their coats clean and fresh; those with looser fur got the dust into their bodies, clogged their skins with dirt, and died in time of the diseases induced by want of Turkish baths and inattention to the most recent sanitary precautions. In this way the moles of the nineteenth century have become hereditarily seised of peculiarly fine soft velvety fur, which is warranted to keep out every grain of dust, and serves a posthumous function, undreamt of by its originators, in the manufacture of warm rain-proof caps for the London costermonger.

It would be a mistake to suppose, however, that because the mole is practically blind and leads the life of a miner he is therefore either a stupid or an unemotional animal. On the contrary, he is an expert engineer, a most intelligent craftsman, an ardent lover, and a very game warrior. His fights with his rivals are severe and fiery. His passions are warm, and his revenge is bitter. No laggart in love, and no coward in war, the mole would have

merited the most unstinted praise of the exacting Border minstrel.

In order to understand these higher emotional and intellectual traits in the mole's character we have to recollect the nature of the arduous labour in which he is perpetually engaged in his pursuit of a livelihood. A mole's life is by no means a gentlemanly sinecure. He has to work harder, in all probability, for his pittance of earthworms than any other animal works for his daily bread. He is the prototypal navvy. His whole existence is spent in perpetually raising and removing large piles of earth by sheer force of muscle. In order to sustain such constant toil, and to replace and repair the used-up tissue, the mole requires to be always eating. His appetite is voracious. He works like a horse, and eats like an elephant. Throughout his waking hours he is engaged in pushing aside earth and scurrying after worms in all his galleries and tunnels. The labourer, of course, is worthy of his hire. Such ceaseless activity can only be kept up by equally ceaseless feeding; and so the mole's existence is one long savage alternation of labour and banqueting. His heart and lungs and muscles are working at such a rate that if he goes without food for half a day he starves and dies of actual inanition. He is a high-pressure engine.

The consequence is that the mole is intense all through; more intense than South Kensington. A 'desperate energy' is the marked trait in his character. Whether he eats or drinks, whether he makes love or offers battle, he does it all with thoroughgoing Italian fierceness. The very cycles of his life are quicker and shorter than those of less eager races. Being a blind haunter of subterranean caverns, day and night are nothing to him; so he sleeps for three hours only at a stretch, and then wakes for three hours again; and after takes another sleep in rotation. He 'works by shifts,' those who know him best will tell you; and he sleeps like a dormouse when he rests from his labours.

His drinking is like his eating: immoderate in all things, he must have his liquor much and often. So he digs many pits in his tunnelled ground and catches water in them, to supply his needs at frequent intervals. He doesn't believe, however, in the early closing movement. Day and night alike, he drinks every few hours; for day and night are all alike to him; he works and rests by turn, after the fashion of the navvies employed in digging tunnels; or measures his time by watches, as is the way of sailors.

Only, while the watches at sea are of eight hours each, the mole's watches—so mole-catchers say—run to only half that period.

Yet it would be a mistake, I imagine, to suppose that our hero's life is entirely made up of eating, drinking, and sleeping. The poetical passions of love and war, on the other hand, play no inconsiderable part in his chequered history. He is an ardent suitor. When he is crossed in his affections, his vengeance is sanguinary. Even rivalry in love he bears with impatience. If two male moles meet in attendance on the same lady of their choice, they soon pick a quarrel, with the quip gallant or the retort courteous, and proceed to fight it out with desperate resolution. Their duel is *à outrance*. Just at first, to be sure, they carry on the war underground; but as soon as they have begun to taste blood, they lose all control of themselves, and adjourn for further hostilities to the open meadow. Indeed, it is seldom that you can see them emerge from their subterranean 'run,' except when seriously ill, or engaged in settling these little affairs of honour. Once arrived upon the battlefield, they go at it literally tooth and nail, and never cease till one or the other has disabled his adversary. Then comes the most painful scene of all, which only regard for historical accuracy induces me to chronicle. As a faithful historian, however, I cannot conceal the fact that the victor mole falls bodily in his triumph upon his fallen antagonist, tears him open on the spot, and drinks his warm blood as some consolation to his wounded feelings. The sense of chivalry and of the decencies of war has been denied to these brave and otherwise respectable insectivores.

Let me hasten to add, in extenuation of these cannibalistic tastes, that the victor mole is probably by that time dying of hunger. Being already tired out with his active exertions, he is suddenly called upon at a moment's notice to defend his life or to attack his rival. He fights, as he eats and loves, with fiery energy. As soon as all is over he is no doubt in a condition of nervous collapse, and unable to realise nice moral distinctions. Even human sailors eat one another at sea to prevent starving. At any rate, 'tis the way of moles to drink their enemies' blood, and much as I believe in the power of the press, I must sorrowfully admit that no amount of missionary effort in the shape of magazine articles seems likely to cure them of this sanguinary proclivity.

A time-honoured proverb has long informed us that 'half the world doesn't know how the other half lives;' and though the

statement is now less true than formerly, owing to the spread of useful knowledge and society journalism, it remains tolerably accurate so far as regards the habits and manners of subterranean animals. The life of the mole, for example, is much more varied and interesting than most people imagine. Underground beasts build nests and forts and other extensive earthworks which mere surface philosophers have very little idea of. Now the *raison d'être* of the mole is to be a devourer and exterminator of the common earthworm. In this great life-task which he sets before himself, he has to pit his intelligence and cunning against the intelligence and cunning of the worms he feeds upon. And worms are much more advanced and thoughtful creatures than a heedless world wots of. They live in neat little burrows or chambers of their own, well paved with pebble-stones, and served by a series of diverging tunnels. During the daytime they lie by, for the most part, in their own apartments, for fear of birds, only venturing out upon the open in search of the fallen leaves which form the staple of their frugal diet, after the shades of evening have sent the larks and thrushes to their nightly resting-places. Then the wary worm peeps forth, eager to escape the early bird who is ever on the lookout for him; and then the mole in turn hies him forth to waylay and devour him.

As a consequence of this internecine duel between the moles and their provender, the blind insectivore has been compelled to adopt the tactics and plans of a trained strategist. He does not live in any spot that comes handy, or fight hap-hazard. His method is systematic. He builds himself a regular fortress, in accordance with the principles of ancestral castrametation, and lays it out on a regular and highly scientific plan. The fortress lies within a mound or tumulus, specially built for its reception, and in shape not unlike that on which a Norman keep is usually planted. Indeed, the likeness of the general arrangements of the mole's citadel to a mediæval *château fort* is far more than accidental; it proceeds from a real similarity of purpose and method. The mound is pierced by several subterranean tunnels, circular in shape, and run at different levels, but connected by short oblique galleries or passages. In the centre is the globular chamber which forms the family living-room. Here the mole may retire to rest, if he likes, every three or four hours, in the bosom of his family. But if any enemy approaches, or if the sacrilegious spade of the mole-catcher invades his privacy, he can dart away at once down one or

other of the passages, and, if need be, retire strategically by one of the numerous runs or tunnels which lead in every direction through his recognised hunting-grounds. For, though title-deeds and conveyances are probably unknown among moles, the worm-producing soil is nevertheless practically divided up among the various proprietors with strict accuracy of tenure; and any propertied mole will fight to the death with the lawless intruder who ventures to disregard his implied notice to the effect that 'Trespassers will be prosecuted.' He holds his lands, like Earl Warren, by the tenure of the strongest.

The central chamber or fort is floored and carpeted with dry leaves, but is comparatively seldom used in summer, being mainly reserved as a winter residence; for, active and voracious as he is, the mole is compelled perforce to hibernate underground while the frost binds the soil and the earthworms are snugly coiled up in their neat little bedchambers. To prevent waste of tissue and consequent starvation during this enforced fast, the frozen-out miner retires for a while to his fortress and sleeps away the winter in a torpid condition. While the cold weather lasts he becomes almost comatose; his heart scarcely beats, his lungs scarcely act, and only so much loss of material goes on as enables the organs to keep just working at extremely low pressure. But as soon as thaw sets in, and the worms are once more on the move, you will see almost instantly numerous fresh hillocks thrown up in the meadows, which announce that the busy mole is fairly on his rounds again. He comes out apace with the earliest celandine.

The conspicuous little mole-hills, however, which often run in lines across a field in very close succession are not for the most part the work of the father of the family himself, but of his faithful helpmate. Even she only throws them up, as a rule, just before the birth of her expected young, when her strength doesn't permit her to undertake anything more than the most superficial excavation. At other times, she digs deeper and less obtrusively; while the male seldom shows his handicraft at all on the surface. The mother always digs a nest for her young apart from the fortress, and lines it with moss or grass as a bed for her little ones. In their earliest stage, I believe, the young moles are vegetable feeders; at least, in nests which I have opened, I have found roots and tubers laid up, apparently, for the use of the babies. If this is so, it would seem to show that moles were originally vegetarian; for the young always revert to the primitive food of the race, and

only acquire the later tastes of their kind as they approach maturity.

Still, it would be vain for the most ardent apologist to deny that the main object of mole life is the pursuit of earthworms. For this cardinal purpose of his existence the mole makes and lays out a large number of runs, intersecting as many burrows as possible of his hereditary food animals. Along these runs he makes continual excursions, devouring every hapless worm he meets on his way, and satisfying as best he may his unquenchable hunger. In time, of course, he clears the old runs almost entirely of game, and to meet this contingency he is continually laying out fresh ones. The worms know well that rapid heaving of the soil which betokens the approach of a mole to their innocent burrows, and the moment they feel it, rush wildly to the surface, prepared rather to face the worst that lark or blackbird may bring upon them than to await the onslaught of their most ruthless and bloodthirsty enemy. If you dig a pointed stick into the ground and shake the earth a little by moving it from side to side, you will find dozens of worms hurry up to the surface at once, under the mistaken impression that the petty earthquake is some mole's doing. For the senses of earthworms are extremely keen, and their perception of danger most acute and vivid.

A person unaccustomed to the ways of worms might wonder that enough of them could be found in the comparatively small tract of land which each mole taboos or occupies as his own to satisfy the needs of so voracious a creature. But, as a matter of fact, the worm population of England is something incredibly high, to be numbered, no doubt, by millions of millions. Every field on our downs is far more thickly populated underground than London is on the surface; every meadow is as dense with teeming thousands of worms as Lancashire is with men, or an ant-hill with emmets. The soil swarms with life. Vinegar kills worms; and where a barrel of vinegar has been accidentally spilt upon the ground the surface is sometimes positively covered before long by a thick layer of wriggling creatures which have come up to die, as is the wont of their species. The abundance and ubiquity of the game explains the numbers and frequency of the hunters. Every mole eats daily many pounds of worms, and yet every field supports a whole villageful of them.

It is the entire drama of nature on a small scale underground—remorseless, self-centred, unfeeling as ever. Worms exist, and

exist in thousands, because there are myriads and myriads of dead leaves for them to live upon. Almost every dead leaf that falls from tree or shrub, or weed or herb, except in autumn (when the supply all at once immensely outruns the demand), they carry underground and bury or devour with ceaseless industry. In doing so they create and keep up the layer of vegetable mould on the surface of the earth which alone makes plant-life, and especially cultivation, possible. Cultivated areas are, therefore, those where worms are most abundant. So far as they themselves are concerned, however, the worms eat only for their own appetite's sake, and never suspect they are the friends of lordly man, whose fields and crofts they thus unconsciously fertilise.

The existence of worms, again, gives rise to the existence of a vast group of birds, of whom the thrush is a familiar English representative, largely developed to prey upon and devour these defenceless creatures. To see the poetical throstle, beloved of idyllic bards, at work upon a worm is to take the poetry out of him once for all with a vengeance. He catches the wriggling and reluctant animal by its head, and begins to munch him slowly alive, changing the bit on which he is engaged from one side of his mouth to the other every now and again, but eating through him steadily from head to tail with entire disregard of the victim's individuality. After he has chewed one piece well, and is ready for another, he gives a hearty tug at the still reluctant worm, and loosens another ring or two from the burrow; then he goes on upon that till he has chewed and eaten it. The worm meanwhile struggles and writhes in vain; and the thrush gives him occasionally a vicious peck when he wriggles, just to keep him quiet. Absurd that a mere worm should venture to disturb a gentleman's dinner by unseemly writhing while he is engaged in munching it.

To avoid the birds, therefore, the worms took early to an underground existence. Straightway, the mole saw an opening in life for himself, and followed them down to their subterranean refuge. An underground herbivore is sure to be succeeded by underground carnivores, just as the rabbit very soon implies the stoat and the ferret, or as the prairie-dog implies the burrowing owl and the subterranean rattlesnake. Once let an opening in life occur for a carnivore anywhere, and some enterprising animal is sure before long to step in and fill it. Worms are very early inhabitants of our planet, and therefore the mole has had plenty

of time to develop a most perfect series of adaptations to their tastes and habits.

Then man supervenes. He is generally unaware, it is true, that the worm is his best friend; but he objects to the unsightliness and mess of mole-hills. They interfere directly with his lawn or his plan of cultivation. So he dooms the mole, just as ruthlessly and recklessly as the mole or the thrush doom the luscious earthworm. Mole-catching is a regular trade by now in our villages; and the mole-catchers are the great authorities upon the life and manners of the creatures they exterminate. So the epic of slaughter goes on from stage to stage. Altogether there are some dozen or so of animals specially developed to prey on earthworms alone; and the owl and the mole-catcher prey upon the fiercest and most powerful among them. For the mole himself has almost as many enemies as his defenceless quarry, and the mother mole passes her life in fear and trembling for the attacks of birds of prey and of weasels or polecats. The more closely one studies the life of the fields, indeed, the more truly is the real moral of nature thrust upon us: 'Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost.'

THE MAN IN THE GREEN TURBAN.

I.

I am afraid that the motives which induced me to go every year and stay a fortnight with my uncle and aunt Huggleton were mixed. My mother had nothing in common with her sister, and as she early discerned that the visits were not congenial she never pressed them upon me. It must have been my father, who had vague ideas of some remote testamentary advantage, who reminded me that it would be well to keep in touch with Uncle Simeon; and perhaps it was the hope of meeting my cousin Rhoda which rendered me more compliant in this case than I often was to such prudent suggestions. Our part of the family had lived abroad for years, and the home-keeping branch looked askance on us. My father in his early years had been a pupil of Gibson, but after producing one or two striking models (one of an Orestes I shall never forget), he grew tired of the steady labour required by his profession, and only worked when he liked. He never liked to work long together, and at last ceased to work at all. Then he took up painting. Then he wrote art criticisms for an Italian newspaper. In fact, he and all of us were Bohemians. We had hard times often, for we never had much money. Suddenly, however, one of the many friends to whom my father had shown kindness died, and left us a few thousand pounds on condition we took his name, which was Winstanley.

Then we came to England, and we had been living in a delightful old house in South Devon for about five years when my story begins. On arriving at home we were all invited to Mudworth Hall, but we suited our English relatives so ill that the experiment of a visit in force was not made again. My father, however, who since his unexpected windfall had learned the pleasantness of being easy about money matters, considered it his duty, as I say, to follow the Quaker precept and 'go where money was,' vicariously, in my person, for a fortnight every July. The reason of our dislike of the Huggletons was obvious. They were all of the strictest sect of the Pharisees. They were Sabbatarians, Millenarians, Predestinarians, and everything they could be which was eccentric and repellent to people who had led the free, art-loving life to

which we had been accustomed. They attended and supported a little chapel of ease compared with which, I am sure, the Little Ease in the Tower was 'a feastful presence full of light.' Here the incumbent, the Rev. Gedaliah Textor, preached twice every Sunday and once every Wednesday on vials and trumpets, and the little horn, and Gog and Magog, and Armageddon, and the number of the Beast. At least, when I attended his ministry this course on prophecy was in full blast, and Uncle Simeon dished up the most hopelessly illogical and impossible of his pastor's expositions at family prayer morning and evening. The whole household lived in mortal antagonism to the vicar of the parish—a scholarly and charming old man, to whose church I once succeeded in inveigling my cousin Rhoda, for which trespass I was duly prayed for by my uncle and preached at by his Levite.

For four years I had succeeded in ending my visit the week before the great local missionary function took place, but on this fifth visit, either I was later than usual, or the meeting was earlier than usual. At all events, before I had been in the house twelve hours I learned that the dreaded gathering was appointed for the following Monday, and that something was to distinguish this particular occasion from all former meetings at the Hall. Placards, leaflets, tracts met you everywhere, and on all of them was the visible presentment or name of the speaker who would accompany the deputation from the parent Society, and who would relate his experience and describe his persecutions, first at a drawing-room meeting, and then, secondly, in the evening at the schoolhouse of the chapel of ease. I have the portraits of the man in my mind's eye as I write, and I have the face of the original still more vividly impressed on my recollection. His name, which was variously pronounced and accented by my uncle, the incumbent, and the Deputation aforesaid, was the Sheikh Assad-el-Deen; but under this name, between inverted commas, was written 'The Man in the Green Turban,' that being regarded, no doubt, as a striking and sensational designation, and being believed by many of his admirers to be the translation of his name, which it was not. 'It is no doubt providential,' said my uncle at breakfast, 'that you should be in time for our local meeting this year, as we expect an arrival of no ordinary—nay, I may say of extraordinary—interest. We shall have the privilege of hearing from his own lips the narrative of the sufferings and hardships to which that zealous confessor of the faith, known as "The Man in the Green Turban," has been

subjected by his benighted and fanatical countrymen. I deem it a matter——'

Uncle Simeon was giving us what I profanely called a dress rehearsal of his introductory speech, and was only recalled to the fact that we were *in camera* by the butler offering him a choice of ham and veal cutlets. He helped himself, and proceeded in a more colloquial strain :

'I mean, we should be thankful to get him down, as last year there was a thin attendance, and the subscriptions have been growing less lately in spite of our dear Mr. Textor's efforts. Rhoda, you do not, I fear, make it known at Sunday School that admission to the annual treat depends on punctuality in sending in the money-boxes: Represent it as a privilege to contribute to spreading the Gospel. The pennies wasted at Mrs. Hardbake's sweet-shop would clothe and educate four black children a quarter; I have made the calculation myself.'

'By what train will the Sheikh be here?' asked my aunt.

'He will be in time for luncheon. He proposes to make the Hall his basis of operations, and from hence to attack the neighbouring parishes, returning to supper each evening.'

'Dear me!' said my aunt, in a tone which betrayed less exultant anticipation at the prospect than her husband displayed. 'Dear me! Will he want anything particular to eat? Black people are peculiar in their habits, and I would tell Mrs. Joynt if he is likely to prefer anything.'

'No, my dear. The Sheikh has thrown away all restrictions of that nature. (I will take some kippered salmon, Jacobs.) The irksome regulations of Indian caste, and the dietary prohibitions of Mohammedanism—resembling, alas! too closely the Lenten observances of the apostate Church of Rome—all are to the enlightened Christian beggarly elements, and have been doubtless discarded by our coloured brother——'

'Is he black, uncle?' said Rhoda innocently.

'No, my dear, no; certainly not black—rather dark, swarthy, bronzed by the sun of Araby, I should say—but we shall see in good time. We must check impatience. It is not, as worldly people say, a mere foible. It is a fault—a fault having the nature of a sin, and capable of developing into it.'

My uncle said grace and retired to his study. I vanished to smoke a furtive pipe in the shrubbery, and then was fortunate enough to find Rhoda equipped for a trip into the village. She

ought, I believe, to have hunted up the parents whose children refused to subscribe to missions; but she submitted to *force majeure* and her love of nature, and wandered with me in the pleasant beech-woods.

That ramble gave me an insight into her character which was a new experience. Living, as I had lived, mostly with artists and journalists, I had never had an opportunity of conversing with a perfectly simple and deeply enthusiastic woman. I had seen on former visits that Uncle Simeon's artificial tone grated on her, and she often winced at the odd contrast between his unctuous spiritual professions and vulgar, self-indulgent habits, but I did not realise until our talk amidst the beeches that her religious beliefs were precisely the same as his. Infinitely more delicate in fibre and refined in expression, of course; but still, doctrinally and practically, she believed what he believed. By temper and training she was a Puritan maiden. It evidently pained her intensely to notice a trace of sarcasm in my remarks about the missionary meeting. The incongruities and inconsistencies which forced themselves upon her notice in the speeches of my uncle were slight flaws in crystal, for no Christian character is complete; but a missionary was the holiest and noblest of men. No one could dedicate himself to evangelistic work without a Divine calling, and all other professions and occupations were sordid and selfish in comparison with this one. It must be remembered that Rhoda never read a novel, that she had no contact with any society save that at the Hall, and that her sole literature consisted of stories in which self-devoted preachers and easily-persuaded negroes filled the canvas. Besides, the discipline of thought, speech, and act in the little circle she moved in was strict and vigilant. Her companions were all pietists, and any phrase that did not come out of the vocabulary was noticed and reprimanded at once. To me, strange as it may seem, all this had a charm, for I felt that with her it was thoroughly real. I did not even apprehend it all. Her words implied motives I did not understand, and influences to which I had never been subject. Still, as we walked through the woods, ankle-deep in fern, and watched the sunshine flash and flicker through the leaves and the squirrel sputter up the beech stems, and listened to the murmurous note of the wood-pigeon and the tinkle of the rivulet that hid itself coyly amongst the grass and only peeped up now and again to deepen the emerald tint of the sod, I felt a sense

of rest and security that was new to me. I was not looking at all the beauty as a sketcher with words or pencil. I was feeling the healthful breath that went out of it all coming into my own being and cleansing it and uplifting it. That hour in the green world was one of the days most to be remembered in my queer rambling life. I have often wondered what would have happened if I had told her then what I was feeling; but I am not sure that I could have done so. Indeed, after-events revealed much to which I was a stranger at the time. That day I was not conscious of any feeling towards Rhoda definite enough to bear putting into words, or else I had no apt words to express the feeling—it was so absolutely vague. I do not know which sentence expresses the case most accurately. All I know is, that the ramble in the sweet woods was all too short, and that we went back to the Hall only just in time to enter the dining-room as the luncheon-bell stopped clanging, and my uncle, between the Deputation and Sheikh Assadel-Deen, was closing his eyes piously for his Levite's unctuous grace.

He introduced me to his guests in a curt sentence, and then, after reminding us somewhat emphatically of our unpunctuality, launched out into the great subject of the day—the assignment of appropriate parts to himself and his two visitors, first at the drawing-room meeting and then at the great field-night in the schoolroom. The Rev. Gedaliah was not expected to be very prominent on these occasions. He had at first resented being put into the background, but soon learned that it was wiser to submit, so he revenged himself for his temporary suppression by being longer, more irrelevant, and more denunciatory than usual on the ensuing Sabbath.

‘Our dear brother Textor,’ Uncle Simeon would say, ‘will be glad of a rest, and so perhaps I, though unworthy, will open the proceedings, introduce the speakers, sum up the results of the addresses, and engage in the final prayer.’

Having thus secured the lion's share of public talk to himself, he proceeded to improve the deeply interesting occasion by inquiries as to the state of the work in foreign countries; to which the replies were, it struck me, singularly evasive and flabby. I may not, however, have done the Deputation justice, for my attention was bent on examining the Sheikh. He was a tall, narrow-shouldered man, with a dark complexion and good features. His eyes were piercing, his lips thick, perhaps sensual, his nose was delicately cut. He had a mark in the middle of his forehead, and

a silver earring in one of his ears. He wore an ill-made suit of clerical black clothes, but it was understood that he would appear after luncheon in native costume. Prejudiced as I am against him, I acknowledge that he had a beautiful voice and spoke English fluently; indeed, I was soon sufficiently interested in him to be anxious to ascertain his real history and to get at his actual antecedents. The memoir of him given in the various tracts and leaflets was occupied with a record of his spiritual progress and experiences, concerning which I could form no opinion.

II.

I LEARNED further particulars later, but more by putting casually dropped statements together than by the speeches of the Deputation and the Sheikh himself at the drawing-room meeting. This last was a great success. Some forty or fifty men, women, and clergymen were present. My aunt and Rhoda did the honours without fussiness, and Uncle Simeon was in his glory. In the glossiest broadcloth and the largest white necktie I had ever beheld he dominated the entire scene, until (I must be accurate) the rising of the Man with the Green Turban.

He had kept behind and in shadow during the speeches of my uncle and the Deputation, but when he stepped forward in an Eastern costume which was a gem of harmonious colouring we felt the hero of the day would not disappoint us.

He began by a compliment to his host, then to England—the only land that ‘conquered without cruelty and converted without coercion’—and after a few florid sentences told us what professed to be the story of his life in a style wonderfully adapted to his audience. The story—when one thought it over afterwards—had odd gaps in it, but at the time it flowed on with a certain verisimilitude.

He was a native of Calcutta; his father, a descendant of the Prophet—hence his green turban—had been a wealthy merchant who had been of service to the Government in the Mutiny, and would have received the Star of India on the institution of the Order in 1861, but he died just before the first Durbar. Though outwardly conforming to Mohammedanism, the Sheikh said, with tears in his voice, that he believed him to have been secretly a believer. Though his father was so rich a man, the speaker, for some mysterious reason unstated, was apparently brought up at a

charity school, where he received his knowledge of the Truth and where he was baptized. Then followed narratives of cruel persecutions on the parts of uncles, cousins, and aunts before unnamed. These drove him to take refuge in Egypt, where at a certain well-known institution he was for a time a teacher. In Cairo he made the acquaintance of a Christian lady *of title*. (The last two words were uttered in a tone which convinced me of his thorough knowledge of our nation.) She had brought him to London, maintained him, and had him educated, and now he was going forth to brave fire and sword that he might 'tell out to his countrymen the precious news,' &c. I am unwilling to write down the solemn words which were poured forth so glibly at the meeting. The speaker knew his audience, and I imagined every word was received as absolutely true by everyone present except myself. Rhoda's eyes were fixed on the face of the speaker as her namesake's might have been on the countenance of St. Peter when he told her of his escape from prison. She sat in rapt attention, and as his voice faltered with emotion and his eyes kindled with enthusiasm I saw the faint flush on her cheek and the quiver of her lower lip which revealed how deeply her spirit was stirred. To such a nature, I thought, the appeal to choose between Diana or Christ could only have one response. If one wanted a model for the Virgin Martyr she was here!

The speech ended, Uncle Simeon summed up in sentences that sounded more platitudinous than ever. Then followed prayer, and hymn, and the dismissal. The audience were loud in their praises and liberal in their donations; but the meeting had exceeded the usual time, and as trains had to be caught by some, and hilly country roads to be encountered by others, the adieux were hurried over and the room quickly cleared. I assisted divers old ladies and gentlemen into wraps and overcoats, and heard on all sides murmurs of satisfaction. 'A blessed opportunity!' 'How thankful we ought to be for the privilege!' 'May it be fruitful indeed to all of us!' 'What an outpouring in the latter days!'

Such was the chorus of praise that resounded on all sides. There was only one jarring note. It came from an old Indian general, Sir Lake Hastings, who did not reside in the neighbourhood, but was visiting at the house of one of my uncle's intimate friends. He grunted out the remark in soliloquy as he was struggling into his ulster, and had no idea that he was overheard: 'I have seen that black chap somewhere, I am certain, but I cannot recollect where.'

III.

THE evening gathering at the schoolroom was a greater success than the drawing-room meeting had been. The Deputation had held back his more sensational anecdotes for the less sophisticated audience, and made his points with the precision constant practice secures. The Sheikh had gained confidence and spoke well. His dress and complexion were not at once a passport to the respect of an English country audience. A certain chemist's assistant had the odious taste to declare in an audible whisper that he looked like Lampson of the Theatre Royal, Dullminster, as Othello in the smothering scene, and certain lewd fellows on the back benches referred to Ethiopian serenaders. If the Sheikh heard these gibes, however, he absolutely ignored them and kept himself steadily in hand, resolved to make as distinct an impression on the yokels and farmers' daughters as he had done on the county people in the afternoon. Again I looked at Rhoda, and saw that directly he began to speak he cast a spell over her entire being. Once it struck me he was watching what effect a striking appeal for more workers in the mission field exercised on his beautiful listener. But this might have been fancy.

During the rest of my stay there seemed to be missionary meetings every day. We were always driving off to distant villages and county towns to assist at gatherings of various kinds, and in all of them the Man in the Green Turban was the centre figure. Every time I heard him I was the more convinced of his ability. The Deputation had four addresses, which he delivered in the same order and with the same intonations of voice and sequence of gesture. The Sheikh was always different, and, if I could only have believed in him, always impressive. But even tales of converted negroes pall at length upon the ear, and the last night of the campaign arrived. Uncle Simeon had given in, and bemoaned his inability to attend the final meeting, to be held at the county town some twelve miles off. I recollected that he had once tried to represent it in Parliament on Protestant principles at the time of the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, and had not been returned, which might perhaps account for his unwillingness to visit it, but Rhoda and my aunt and the Deputation and the Sheikh went. At the last moment the Rev. Gedaliah asked to be allowed a seat in the carriage, and on returning he was dropped at his

vicarage. Thus it happened that as I strolled out in the moonlight smoking a cigar, having seen my uncle dutifully to bed, I saw the Sheikh hand Rhoda from the carriage, linger with her until the rest of the party came up—which they were provokingly slow in doing—and at last raise her hand to his lips as they hurried through the conservatory. As all this passed I was conscious of a sharp pang, and, like Maria in 'Twelfth Night,' 'felt like hurling things.' The next day the visitors at the Hall scattered. The missionary wave receded from that division of the county, and lawn tennis resumed its reign. The date of my departure was hastened by a letter from my father, so though I would have given much to have had another talk with Rhoda, no opportunity occurred.

IV.

I FOUND that a correspondent was wanted by an illustrated newspaper to proceed at once to the Cape, and that I was recommended for the post. Of course I started delighted with the prospect, and for months Boers, kraals, and zereebas, the blunders of officials and the desperate doggedness with which Englishmen fight their way out of them, occupied every thought. I returned home. My work had satisfied my employers, and I was told to hold myself in readiness for another job; so, cutting short my stay in town, I wrote to Devonshire to tell my father and mother I should come down at once. Owing to changes of place and defective communication, many of their letters addressed to Cape Town had not reached me, and I found a formidable batch of them put into my hand by the hall porter of my little club in Hanover Square on the evening before I left London. I was giving some friends and brother artists a little dinner that evening, and went into the library to wait for my guests. They were late, so I mechanically opened one of my letters. It was from my mother, and was five months old. It began with many expressions of anxiety for my safety, for it was written when a battle was imminent. I ran my eye over the first pages, for they were all ancient history. Then I came to news of home and family doings. Those I looked at more carefully, thinking they might tell me something I should be expected to be acquainted with when I got to Devonshire. I caught one sentence: 'You will be surprised and grieved to hear that your pretty cousin Rhoda has married a native missionary, said to be very pious and devoted, but, as your father says, that

does not make up for his being what we should call a black man. I am grieved that she should throw herself away like that, for you know, my dear, I always hoped that you would——'

I was interrupted by the hearty voice of my friend Jack Aylward, and the rest of my guests entered immediately. We were busy talking 'shop' in a moment, and, thanks to high spirits and champagne, the evening was a success. Everyone had his story to tell and his joke to make. We had gone through rough scenes in common, and had many a queer adventure to recall. I never worked so hard in my life to keep the ball rolling, and I believe nobody found out the effort it cost me.

After a hurried visit to my people I went abroad again. The next months of my life were busily occupied. There were always little wars, or autumn manoeuvres, or royal or imperial pageants to be sketched and described, and I found myself running over the world with eyes on the alert and pencil in hand, having very few pauses for rest or reflection. The occupation suited me admirably. I was young and active, a good horseman, with a body patient of fatigue, and a keen interest in men and things. I may say without vanity that I felt my reputation was rising every year, and I had the greatest pleasure in life—the knowledge that I had chosen the right calling for my tastes and capacities.

V.

So time swept by until the winter of 1882, when I found myself in Cairo. I took up my quarters at the Hôtel du Nil, which, as everybody knows, is situated off the Muski. The street has been modernised lately, but then it had an awning of matting over it, and presented at every turn quaint glimpses of Eastern life. Its very signboards, in Arabic, Greek, Roman, and Armenian characters, were a study, and the costumes of the groups that thronged its narrow causeway kept me perpetually taking out my sketch-book. The hotel, which hid itself away at the end of a narrow alley slanting out of this thoroughfare, was a favourite haunt of authors and artists. It consists of a quadrangle with galleries round three sides looking down on a garden of palms and flowering trees. The poinsettia blazed in scarlet splendour in winter, and, later, roses, clustering convolvulus, and the gorgeous mantle of bougainvillea festooned the alcoves and twisted over the kiosks.

Here I landed, with many portmanteaus of curios and an

armoury of spears and scimetars, after six months of hard work in India. I knew Egyptian sketches would be in request shortly, and so resolved to employ myself for the winter, not without a presentiment that events would develop themselves which would make it worth my while, in the interests of my newspaper, to be on the spot.

I had come to this conclusion when listening to the talk of soldiers and civilians in Calcutta, and so I was not surprised to find a letter awaiting me at Suez advising a sojourn in Egypt, as there would be plenty to do there before long.

It was the third day after my arrival (can I ever forget it ?); I had lunched, and was chatting with my next-door neighbour, a clever German Egyptologist, when I noticed a lady in mourning lying in a long Indian chair, with a servant adjusting her shawls and arranging her pillows. I had heard that there were some new arrivals on the previous evening, and made up my mind that this was one of them. My Professor engrossed my attention with some startling theories about the Great Pyramid, and I did not look at the two women until the Herr had fallen tranquilly asleep after satisfactorily demolishing the hypotheses of six French *savants*. Then I rose to find myself face to face with Rhoda !

She was terribly changed, and I looked at her with a blended feeling of pity and resentment, for I felt sure she had been cruelly used. In a few moments I learned the facts. After two years of married life her husband had died. Later I collected particulars. After their marriage the Sheikh had found himself in delicate health and had declared his inability to go to India. The fire with which he had glowed during the memorable revival week had suddenly and unaccountably cooled down. The great crusade which he had preached—the pioneer work amongst new and hostile provinces of the benighted followers of Islam—the conflict for which he was girding himself, had suddenly lost its attraction, and Rhoda had apparently resided with my uncle and aunt until a mysterious call of duty had summoned the Sheikh abroad, and, after an anxious interval without letters, a telegram announced his illness, and another his death at Singapore. The shock had been severe, and, after remaining for some time in a state which gave the father and mother acute anxiety, it had been determined to send the young widow to Egypt. She was herself meditating a longer voyage and a visit to her husband's grave ; but for the present she was too ill to undertake a further sea journey, and

was simply resting and trying to recover her strength after the shock of the sudden news. I cannot say how unspeakably thankful I was to be near her. Though the change in her appearance wrought by her sufferings was at first so dreadful to me that I scarcely dared to look at her, I soon found that she was the same Rhoda whose sweetness and charm had opened upon me on that happy day in the woodlands. I believe—and it is one of the most cherished thoughts of my life—that I was helpful to her at this time. The surroundings were new and strange to one who had never been out of England, and my experience softened little rugged places in her path and prevented her from finding herself entirely amongst strangers. By mutual consent, certain subjects were avoided. I did not speak of the Sheikh or her married life, and of course she rarely referred to it; but I convinced myself she had not been happy, and that she had been keenly disappointed in her husband. I noticed she insisted less than of old on the special doctrines of her peculiar creed, and it seemed to me that those lofty professions which had always been repellent to me had become distasteful to her by the contrast they afforded to her husband's actual practice. She avoided phraseology that had once seemed to express realities to her, but which she now rated at a lower value.

Thus the only barrier between us was vanished or vanishing, and she was more precious to me every hour I lived in her dear company. My sketches and descriptions of places interested her, and I found she had followed me in my wanderings during the time we had been separated. I mentioned there was a servant with her. Hester Mason had been a pupil in her Sunday School class, and had been her maid before she was married. She was a quiet but shrewd girl, and always showed in the way that a tactful servant can that she liked me to be with her mistress. On more than one occasion she knocked at my door and asked me to come in at afternoon-tea time and try and persuade her mistress to take a drive, as she was very depressed and wanted brightening up, and once she ventured on a remark which was evidently to relieve her mind and lead me to question her.

'Oh, sir, I do wish Miss Rhoda—I won't call her by that heathen's name she never ought to have took—I say I do wish she would forget all about him, and not mope over his letters, and keep gazing and gazing at the telegram, every word of which she must know as well as the Church Catechism. And I do wish

master had put off the marriage until Sir Lake had got them letters from India he expected to get. It was all bound to be, I suppose; but nothing shall ever make me believe different than that it was the General's visit as made him pack off.

'How do you mean?' I said, half ashamed of myself for allowing a servant to speak of a subject so sacred, and yet so convinced of the girl's affection and faithfulness that I felt we had a bond of sympathy that justified me in encouraging her to speak.

'Well, sir, it was this way. Directly it was known that Miss Rhoda was to marry him, General Lake Hastings, who had seen him at the missionary meeting when you was down, sir, called, and was shut up with master for two hours; and I heard from James the footman that he told master not to be in such a hurry with the match, and to wait until he wrote letters and got answers from India. But master said the black man was "a chosen instrument," and "a vessel," and all them things as they talk about in tracts, and persisted; but the General, who is a very hot-tempered gentleman, as them is sometimes that comes from furrin parts, stamped out of the hall in a rage, and muttering bad words, and saying "Shame!" "Shame!" quite loud to himself all down the avenue till he got to his carriage.'

'Yes; but you said he called upon Miss Rhoda's husband —'

'He did, sir; about a week before he went away, but nobody knows what he said because that black man fastened the green baize door (he had made master put double doors to the rooms because of the cold English climate) and locked t'other one directly the General said he wanted to speak to him. But whatever he heard, it was nothing he liked, depend on it, for he was that bad the next day he could not preach nor conduct the devotions nohow, but began a preparing for a journey directly.'

This was Hester's contribution to my anxiety. I felt there was something wrong, but beyond the vaguest suspicions I had nothing to go upon. I tried to force myself to acknowledge my strong prejudice against the Sheikh, and to attribute much to the inborn dislike and disgust which the servant class in our country have to foreigners. Besides, the evil was done and the sin sinned. Hester once hinted that the Sheikh had been unkind and cruel to his wife on more than one occasion, and if he had lived would have broken the poor lamb's heart; but I felt bound to check all disclosures of this kind, and hinted the same sharply and unmistakably. Meantime I felt that all I heard gave Rhoda a

stronger claim on my regard and affection, and I strove to brighten her life by such kindness as a brother might have shown, conscious all the time that my regard was deeper and warmer than I could ever have felt for a sister.

VI.

BUT our little romance was about to be absorbed in the stormy events of politics. For some time I had felt that the state of Egypt was volcanic, though the little group of artists and *savants* who lounged and smoked in the hotel garden talked of their own hobbies in serene unconsciousness of the forces that were in action outside. In my quality of journalist I gathered information from officials, and I knew that Arabi—or rather the movement of which he was the mouthpiece—would have to be reckoned with. The state of Cairo was becoming more and more critical. Resident Europeans were sending their families home, and at last I received a hint from the Consul-General that all English ladies had best go to Alexandria, as thence they could take ship easily in case of trouble; and he added that even Alexandria was not so safe as it might be, and recommended everybody who had wives, sisters, or cousins to send them to England. I told Rhoda at once, and she resolved to do as I advised. I accompanied her to Alexandria, and on May 17, in the cold and weird half-light of the memorable eclipse, which was used with great effect by the rebels as a portent to discourage the royalist party and presage ruin to their cause, I said farewell to her. The steamer was crowded with women and children with anxious faces. All those who had any interest in Egypt felt it a nervous time. The wives whose husbands had to remain at their posts said 'Good-bye' to them with dread looking out behind their courageous smiles.

'I can never thank you enough. Take care of yourself. You have been very good to me.'

Those three sentences were all she said, but to me they were

Infinite riches in a little room.

Not Solicitude and Thankfulness, but—richest jewel of all—Hope.

I returned at once to Cairo, for there my work lay. It was a strange time. Everybody was expecting something; no one knew what. There were rumours of all kinds, and extraordinary revelations of character. Some men credited with strength and

energy displayed the most abject weakness. Others, who were popularly labelled as 'poor creatures,' surprised you with their pluck and resource. My most trusted friend, whom I will call R., but to whose position I cannot even now give a clue, had gauged the position of parties accurately, and to him such credit as my letters obtained for me is due. The way in which I gleaned the information which made my fortune as a correspondent connected itself, however, strangely, with the family history I am telling. Though many persons were suspected of being Arabists, and though the leaders of the revolt were known, there were doubts about several leading men, and it was particularly important to learn if the inspirers of the movement had touch with the Red Revolutionists of the Continent. These and many important facts could only be ascertained by getting admission to one of the secret meetings, and I learned (it is not prudent to say by what channel) when and where the meetings took place. Bakshish liberally distributed, and still more liberally promised on the fulfilment of certain conditions, secured me promise of admission to this place of rendezvous. I determined at all hazards to see the matter through and find out exactly who were the prompters of the native leaders, some of whom, I was persuaded, were mere puppets whose wires were held by abler hands.

The day came. I had undertaken many risky adventures, and gone into them with a light heart; but this time I confess to feeling nervous. The sort of work was new to me; and, besides, since I had recovered Rhoda, life seemed more worth living than it had been before. The hour when the conspirators met was ten o'clock at night; the place an old house accessible by an intricate zig-zag of narrow alleys to the left of the Muski. I had been warned to arrive a full hour before the meeting-time, and as the clock of the Franciscan church struck nine I lifted the heavy iron knocker and struck once, counted ten, and knocked again twice—two sharp raps. The most complicated specimen of that clumsiest of contrivances, an Arab bolt, was withdrawn, and I stood in a large courtyard with the pipe of a fountain that did not spout in the middle. I entered the *salamlik*, or men's apartment—a high, bare room with a few small inlaid tables for holding coffee and cigarettes, and two or three shabby divans. My friend the man whom I had 'gratified,' as Gil Blas would say, then proceeded to point out the peculiarity of the room, and to tell me what I was to do. At one end was a sort of gallery, ornamented with gilding

and intricate traceried patterns, but with no door from behind opening into it, and no steps leading up to it. I have seen these erections often in Turkish houses, and after forming many theories as to their purpose, have come to the conclusion they were not intended to serve any purpose at all. On the present occasion, however, my friend intimated that I was to climb up into this post of vantage on a ladder which was to be removed, and that then I was to lie flat behind the ornamental scroll-work carving, which was sufficiently deep to conceal me, and from that hiding-place see and hear what went on in the room below. The prospect was sufficiently uncomfortable; but my task had to be carried through. The shaky ladder was brought. I mounted and lay down. The place was inches deep in dust and dirt, and at first I sneezed like the hunchback in the Arab story, but at last I found a sort of mattress to put my head on. Cramped and uneasy, I waited for the longest hour I had ever passed. The time seemed to drag as though every minute contained six hundred seconds, not sixty. At last my friend (of course, he was called Mohammed) brought in a couple of paraffin lamps. Then I was conscious of the presence of several persons in the room below, and heard the ordinary salutations exchanged. The men dropped in slowly, never more than two at a time, and at last, I suppose, all who were expected arrived. Then followed long speeches, interruptions, questions, and replies—in fact, an animated debate. Most of the speakers talked Arabic, which I knew very imperfectly, but two or three employed French. The character of the speeches differed as much as the language. Some were full of public spirit and zeal for the expulsion of the foreigner. Some seemed little more than a string of texts from the Koran. Some, as I guessed from the recurrence of well-known names, were virulent attacks on the holders of several rich posts which the orator evidently wanted for himself and his friends. The studied harangues of the head of the revolt were a strange mosaic of verses from the holy book and phrases from the French revolutionary writers. At last, after listening with straining ears to let no word that I could understand escape, and peeping cautiously to see the faces of the group until I was tired out, a diversion was made by a knock at the door. Then there was an eager discussion as to whether the new-comer should be admitted. Several persons spoke French; hence I was able to understand that the new arrival was a delegate of some importance who brought news from sympathisers in India. At last it was

decided to admit the emissary. The door was opened, and he entered. Again there were long salutations, coffee-drinking, and salaams. At last, when I felt my powers of attention on the verge of exhaustion, I heard the preluding sentences of a speech. The tones, the inflexions, the melody of the voice were unmistakable. I raised myself on my elbow and looked through an aperture in the gilded scroll-work. There was no mistaking the man. There he was in his green turban—the Sheikh Assad-el-Deen. He was not dead, then. That was the fact that possessed me. Then mechanically I listened. He spoke in French, and no previous speaker had approached him in bitterness against Christianity. He mocked the most sacred mysteries. He sneered at the hypocrisy of religious profession. He cynically contrasted our rule of life with our practice. There was nothing sacred to him. And this foul-mouthed fiend had been cherished by my people, and had been the husband of an English girl whose every thought was truth and purity!

There was no apology or extenuation possible. Had I been inclined to find one, every sentence I listened to would have made it more and more entirely out of the question. He counselled simulation, so as to lull us into the sleep of a false security, and then an unrelenting massacre of every English man, woman, and child in Cairo, Alexandria, and the great towns. He said his father had been treacherously murdered after the Indian Mutiny, and drew a horrid picture of the righteous vengeance, as he called it, which Nana Sahib executed on the infidels. It was clear that one or two of his listeners thought he had gone too far; but his eloquence told, and I felt when he had done that the national party was stronger, and our position more critical, than I had imagined.

At last the meeting broke up. I was a prisoner on my shelf until Mohammed returned, after seeing the men safely off, and brought the ladder. I could hardly lift myself up, and when I did manage to get on firm ground again I was almost dizzy with the shock I had received. The wretch was alive, and Rhoda, my dear love, who two hours ago had made life worth living for me, was his wife! There was no hiding the fact. I had sense enough after a few minutes to ask some questions about the conspirators. Mohammed gave me the names of several of them. This information was of great value to me subsequently. I then asked about the man who came late.

‘He is a Sheikh from Hind, He has not been in Egypt long,

but he is a great man, and very rich, for he has married the only daughter of Y—— Pasha, who will be Prime Minister before many months are over.'

VII.

MY bodily weariness gave me sleep that night. Next morning I wrote my letters and sent off my telegram. I had at least the satisfaction of knowing that I was the only correspondent who had sent home accurate tidings as to the conspiracy which was ripening to revolt so rapidly. This done, I had a few necessary interviews, and then sat down to realise what had befallen me, and to see what could best be done to save Rhoda.

The position was terrible. The man to whom she was married was one from whom any masterstroke of villainy might be expected. He might have had a wife in India, and Rhoda's marriage in England may have been invalid. I execrated the folly of my uncle, and thought and said in the bitterness of my spirit many things about religion and religionists that I was ashamed of. Still smarting under the sense of powerlessness to redeem a cruel wrong, I must be judged leniently if all the agencies that directly or indirectly had brought that wrong about were alike hateful to me. I was feverish with anxiety to *do* something—but what? I sat for hours in my room revolving the problem, then I went out and walked aimlessly about the streets. I stopped before an Indian curiosity shop and looked in. How well I recollect the pattern of some filagree work that I priced and examined as a pretext for loitering! The native shopkeeper was, like the rest of his brethren, swarthy of face, lithe of limb, oily of tongue; and he tried to baffle my attempts to beat down his price with deprecatory gestures and cajoling smiles. I was thinking so little about my bargain that I believe I put down twice as much as I need have done. According to the rules of the bazaar game, the Indian should have smiled and offered me a brass idol or a bangle as a bakshish. Instead of that, as he folded up my purchase his face grew livid; he sprang over his counter and brushed me out of the shop, upsetting a pile of screens, bowls, fans, and trinketry. I went to the door just in time to see the Sheikh and one of the men I had watched last night enter a carriage and drive away, while the Indian, like a hunting leopard in the leash, ready to spring, crouched behind a pile of merchandise which projected over the pavement, and strained his eyes after the disappearing pair.

'Do you know that man?' I asked as he entered quivering with excitement.

'Man, Sahib!' and he poured out a string of curses in his own language that, if the proverb is true about young chickens, must have crowded every roosting-place of his future life with retributive visitations. I pressed him to tell me something more; but after his outburst he was silent and nervous, evidently anxious to get rid of me, for he handed me my purchase and said something about closing his shop. I hesitated for a moment, and then resolved to try and enlist the man as an ally. I told him I would reward him if he would tell me something of the Sheikh's movements.

'It is not good, Sahib; it is not good.'

I told him I knew the man, and that I could bring him to justice and have him punished.

'It is not good, Sahib; it is not good. It is not *you* who must punish him.'

At this moment a group of tourists with veils and sunshades poured into the shop. I turned to see if I knew them, and in a moment the Indian had caught up something in a sheath that lay on a counter and disappeared. Another man, his partner, began chattering to the customers, and far away in the distance I saw the flying feet and fluttering silk garment of the Indian, as he ran, swift as an arrow, in pursuit of the enemy.

VIII.

ABOUT a week passed. Every day brought confirmatory news of the progress of the military conspiracy, and the feelings of suspicion and irritation increased. I was warned not to transmit any important information to Europe through the Egyptian telegraph, but to wire from Alexandria, so, when certain facts came to my knowledge that seemed to point to a speedy outburst, I resolved to take the morning train. Knowing I was watched, I did not give any orders to the waiters about being called early, but breakfasted and, taking my sketching-traps with me, strolled out as I usually did. Some interruption delayed me, however, and I reached the station as the bell was ringing. I ran up the steps and through the refreshment-room, but the wicket leading from the waiting-room to the platform was shut.

It was disappointing, especially as the train did not start for

two minutes at least, and had the gate not been shut before the proper time I could easily have taken my place. The Arab ticket-taker having once locked the gate and said 'Makfool,'* was inexorable. I stood staring at the carriages as they moved out of the station. In the last first-class compartment was the Sheikh; in the first second-class carriage the Indian.

What could it mean? Were they both evading me? Were they in league, and was the anger of the silver-worker feigned? I think the only thing that I was certain about *in rerum natura* was that there was no unreality in that wrath, and no evasion of its deadly purpose possible.

There was nothing to be done but to go to my hotel, which I did, for I was too excited to sketch, and, indeed, it was too hot to work, except in the shady bazaars and mosques, which at this time were not very safe, ill words, hisses, hustlings, and stones being the portion of the Christian who went into the native quarters of the city.

I can never be too thankful that that day was mail-day and the mail brought me a letter from Rhoda. It was, like herself, frank and kindly. She put in writing, she said, what she was afraid she had not expressed in words—her deep gratitude—and asked me to let her hear from me from time to time, as she was anxious. I read the lines very often, and now, though years have passed away, I read them still. Determined not to miss the train this time, I went half an hour before the starting-hour to the large dingy railway station. There were groups of people about, talking to each other, who did not seem to have come to take the train. I asked the engine-driver if there was anything the matter. He said telegraphic communication was stopped by an accident, and the natives said there was trouble at Tanta. I started on my journey. At any other time I should have enjoyed it, for the train passes through a series of pleasant landscapes. But a strange anxiety for the solution of my mystery, and a presentiment that that solution was at hand, filled my mind. We reached Tanta. I saw the crowd of mud-built houses, the dome of the great mosque—centre of Arab fanaticism in Egypt—the slender minarets, the two towers of the Christian church. I looked out on the dusty platform and on the barred and shuttered windows of the station. There were a crowd of natives, some in robes and turbans, some in stiff black Stambouli coats. There were fruit-

* *Makfool* = 'It is closed.'

sellers with cool green melons, and some hideous deformed children fighting viciously. Just by the *bureau* of the *chef de la gare* there was an open space, now railed with wooden palings and planted as a garden. The last time I passed—about a month ago—a crimson oleander was blooming on the very spot where I saw what I am going to describe.

A crowd of men gathered in a circle, enthralled by the extraordinary eloquence of Sheikh Assad-el-Deen. I could see by his vivid gestures and their silent, attentive faces that they were under the spell. I could not hear what he said, but one or two familiar sounds recurred, and I knew he was stirring them up to some deed of bloodshed. Half mad, I tried to get out of the carriage to reach him and strike him down. Fortunately, the door was locked, for I should have been torn piecemeal had I interfered. I believe he was urging them to stop the train we were in and murder all the Christian passengers by laying them on the rails and letting the engine pass over them. I saw the faces of his listeners flame with fanatical passion, when suddenly, from behind or out of a tomb hard by, flashed a half-naked figure. He cut through the crowd and fastened on the speaker. An arm rose with gleaming steel in the hand. It fell, and the evil genius of my life and Rhoda's was out of them both for ever.

If the wretch uttered any cry it was drowned in the shriek of the engine that bore our train out of danger; for had we stayed in the station longer, the mob would have acted on the Sheikh's advice.

I never saw the Indian again, and cannot tell whether he escaped. Later, I learned that he had received an injury from Sheikh Assad which no Oriental could forgive, and had dogged him for years.

From that day political matters engrossed me. I was all through 'the events.' Then I returned to England, and, exactly a year after we parted at Alexandria in the mysterious shadow of the eclipse, Rhoda and I were married.

AN AMERICAN LOCK-UP.

I.

I LEFT Baltimore, convalescent from a bad attack of fever which had kept me in bed for some time. I had been but a few hours in New York, and was lying down, when the 'help' told me I was wanted. 'There's a couple of fellers waunts to see you,' she said, and disappeared. I went downstairs and saw two strangers. Our conversation resulted in the rather hurried exit of one, and in the other's introducing himself to me, by means of a tin badge on his shoulder, as a sheriff's officer. He told me I was his prisoner. As there was no help for it, I acquiesced. He proposed, he said, 'fixing me up at Ludlow Street'—a debtors' prison and common house of detention. By his advice I elected to enter as a boarder. That entitled me to all the 'privileges,' which is, being interpreted, that I had the run of the house, and might have in anything I could pay for. The advice turned out to be worth having, and I am grateful for it to this day.

It was between eight and nine at night, when, in company with the sheriff's officer, I entered Ludlow Street gaol. As the outer door banged behind us I do not quite know how I looked, but I felt white and giddy; and it was not until my name had been registered in the books, and I had been ushered through a grated door into the prison proper, that I had sufficient courage to look round. The click of the locks a little unnerved me, and the care with which the warder closed each door before opening the next, was particularly offensive. The shutting of a door has a peculiar significance when you reflect that you may not open it yourself again; and the sense of utter helplessness it breeds in you is, so far as I know, unique in human experience. I would gladly have run away, but I could not. I was a prisoner, and alone in the reception-room of Ludlow Street lock-up. So I lit a cigarette and looked about me.

The reception-room is the room where the prisoners receive their friends—and lawyers. It is a lofty place, in shape not unlike what architects call a 'T square,' with one side of the cross-piece cut off, while the other remains to form a sort of large

recess. Fastened to the walls are a good many chairs and benches, and at the end of the recess is a large, naked-looking writing-desk, with pens and ink, and so forth. Scattered about the floor are a number of big iron spittoons—'spit boxes' the warder termed them boldly; and to the left are several doors—one leading into the yard and left wing of the prison, another to the kitchen and dining-room, a third opening upon a flight of perforated iron stairs, conducting in their turn to the cells, which run in long galleries, one above the other, the whole length and breadth of the building. It was not excessively comfortable, nor excessively dirty, nor even extravagantly inhuman; but I wondered at it all with a sickness of curiosity and disgust. My nerves were attent, and I began to understand why people prefer death on the highway to life in a workhouse.

In the reception-room there were three people besides myself. Two were prisoners, and one was a visitor. Of the prisoners, the first (James Fish, ex-president of a Bank) was a nice, mild, pleasant-looking, soft-voiced gentleman of about sixty-five, in a grey tweed suit and a black skull-cap. I was taken with the look of him; and when next day he told me his story (some of which I already knew from the journals) I pitied and sympathised with him with all my soul. The visitor was his, so I fell to looking at the other, his 'co-mate and brother in exile.' An ill-looking dog at the best, he was leaning against the wall, smoking vigorously, his hat on the back of his head, one hand in his breeches-pocket, and one leg over the other, swinging from side to side with an ugly nervousness that was maddening. He was of medium height, well dressed, and in a wicked kind of way quite handsome: with a fine, well-shaped sawy face, close-clipped, jet-black beard, and a long, heavy, drooping moustache, which dissembled—as inspection revealed—one of the cruellest mouths I ever saw. His eyes, which were of a brownish-green, seemed bursting from his head; he was plainly devoured with expectation. As I looked at him he began to look much at me, and I had got dreadfully apprehensive of his approach, when, to my relief, there entered another gaol-bird, who sat down by me and immediately entered into talk. After the customary formalities, I took the liberty of asking my new acquaintance (who was an old hand, and thoroughly well posted in everybody's case) what the dark creature was 'in' for. Of course it was embezzlement—he was quite a high-class criminal, you see—embezzlement and an ungenerous habit of falsifying his accounts.

He had been cashier in a large hotel in New York, and had had the handling of all the money. He got an excellent salary, but he had expensive tastes, and could not contrive to live on it. The result was that when he wanted money (and that was pretty frequently) he helped himself. He had done so, it appears, to the extent of some four thousand dollars; and, when his speculation had come to light, had tried to foist the affair upon one of the directors, to whom (he said) he had handed the money on order and without a formal receipt. He was arrested; sent to the Tombs (a criminal jail) to await his trial; lodged there for eleven days; and then, on the application of his lawyer, remanded to Ludlow Street, where he had been housed about a week when I first saw him.

In the course of this history a visitor was announced for its hero, and to him there entered a woman. She was of the middle height, and plainly dressed in black; and with her careworn, white face, unnaturally old and shrunken, she looked the picture of misery. He received her chillingly enough, yet with a certain nervous embarrassment, and they sat down together in the recess. I heard nothing of their talk, but I could see enough to understand without hearing. He sat there, tilting his chair, and blowing smoke into her face as she spoke, and every now and then he would sneer out some monosyllable in reply. She stayed perhaps five minutes; and then they parted, and she went away in tears (such bitter tears!), he not even troubling to see her to the first grating, but shrugging his shoulders and chewing the end of his cigar. All the while, too, he was ill at ease, for the fearful whiteness of his face contrasted curiously with his would-be swashbuckling air. He seemed relieved when she had departed; and I understood the reason when, a few minutes later, another, and a much younger, woman came to see him. My impression is that she had watched the other go. She was pretty, in an impudent kind of way, and she was very well dressed. At sight of her the fellow changed almost to another man. He ran forward to meet her, caught her in his arms, and kissed her again and again. Then he drew her into the recess, and they sat down, she in the other woman's seat. He put his arm round her neck, and she lay with her head on his shoulder; and so they sat, and talked, until the bell rang for visitors to leave. He walked with her to the grating, his arm still round her, and kissing her as they went; nor would he let her away until the warder took her by the arm, and put her out. She, too, cried at parting, but some-

how her tears awoke no sympathy of mine. I saw the two women come and go, and I know how I felt. The first one was his wife. I can taste the flavour of his rank tobacco even yet.

The visitors having all departed, I was introduced by my new friend to the old gentleman. 'I am delighted to see you,' he said; and then, seeing my face pale, he added, 'but would sooner, for your sake, have had that pleasure outside.' This is the regulation joke; it is generally the first thing a new comer is greeted with. For a moment I was inclined to be angry; but it was said so good-naturedly, that, miserable as I was, I was forced to laugh. From that time we two were on the best terms. He gave me a cigar (a very good one), and we sat down. We had been chatting a few minutes when a new prisoner was brought in. His appearance was a study. Rather short and very dirty, he was dressed in a suit of rusty brown and a top-hat, both very much the worse for wear; and with his almost russet-coloured boots and unshaven face he looked as though he had been hauled straight out of a rag-shop. Added to this, he squinted horribly; and yet, as he stood there, blinking at the gas, there was a touch of pathos about him too—he might have passed for a newfangled ideal of simplicity. He seemed surprised to find himself in prison. The bailiff had told him he was wanted by a friend, and with child-like ingenuousness he now fell to asking where his friend was. In reply the bailiff produced his warrant, and with the utmost gravity went through a mock ceremony of introduction. This he concluded by saying, 'Now you know each other I'll git out of this'; which, being an officer, and therefore a man of his word, he did.

The captive stared round him vacantly; took off his hat; polished it thoughtfully with the palm of his hand; squinted stupidly at everybody; and then, with a great sigh, sat down. Poor fellow! He was the captain of a little coaster, and should have put to sea that night; but he was arrested for a debt of forty dollars, the ship sailed without him, and he lost his berth and his liberty at one blow. Suddenly he jumped up and said, with the utmost simplicity and earnestness, 'I've got an appointment at half-past ten, and it's most important.' 'Is that so?' asked the warder. 'Yes,' replied the sea-captain; 'I must go, but I'll be back by eleven, sure.' 'I hope so,' said the warder, 'because, if you stayed later, you might git me into trouble.' 'Oh, I wouldn't do that for the world,' said the sea-captain. 'Quite sure you won't git lost?' inquired the warder. 'Oh, quite,' said the sea-

captain. 'Well, good-bye,' said the warder, laughing. 'Open the door then,' said the sea-captain eagerly. 'George,' sang out the warder, 'open the door of Sixteen for this heer tenderfoot, he wants to go to sleep.' Anything like the mariner's astonishment I have never witnessed. He did not seem able to understand that the warders were fooling him; and with the utmost gravity he went on begging to be allowed to depart upon parole, until at last the turnkey lost his temper, called him a 'd——d fool,' and pushed him upstairs—rather roughly I thought—and I saw him no more that night. Poor simple sea-captain! Is he still in hold, I wonder? He looked the sort of man to stay there for ever.

Shortly after this we all went upstairs to the second gallery of cells (their inmates called them 'rooms'), and in one of these I was introduced to several other gaolbirds. The first question put to me was the ceremonial, 'When do you expect to go out?' I answered with the traditional, 'To-morrow morning.' There was a shout of derisive laughter. 'Ah, we all say that,' some one was kind enough to observe; 'I said it, and thought it too; but I've been here eleven months and three days, God help me!' I may here remark that I never once heard a man refer to his imprisonment without mentioning the odd days over and above the weeks or months he had served. My impression is that they count the hours, and the minutes too. I know I did.

I sent out for half-a-dozen of Bass, for which I paid one-and-eightpence a bottle, and, by the old gentleman's advice, for some candles to light my cell with (there being no gas), and a sheaf of newspapers to read. I sat on the edge of a bed, drinking beer and wondering when I should be locked in for the night. I was not kept long in suspense. The warder appeared and called me by name. 'This way,' he said; and I bade the others good-night, and followed where he went. After marching me the whole length of the gallery, he stopped suddenly, wheeled half round, flung open a door and said, 'Inside!' Inside I passed. Bang! clack! went the door behind me, an outside bolt was shot viciously, and I was alone. I struck a match, lit my candles—there were four, and had there been forty I should have lit them all—and took a look at my 'room.' It was about six feet square, and very lofty, with black walls of solid stone and a floor of cast iron. Moreover, it was very dirty, and smelt like damp whitewash. Directly facing the door, which was also of iron, solid, save for a lattice at the top, was a very small and very filthy deal table, fixed to the stonework with large iron staples and crutched in

front with one rickety leg. Alongside the wall, to the left, was my bed. A curious piece of furniture it was. Of solid iron, about five feet long and two feet wide, it stood perhaps eighteen inches high; it was covered with a flimsy quilt of a curious yellow; it was furnished with a consumptive-looking straw mattress, about two inches in thickness, worn into a hollow in the middle, and stinking like a disused cellar; and it was covered with a coarse canvas sheet. There was a blanket, too, but it felt so greasy and smelled so deadly that, incontinently, I threw it under the table. The pillow was the mattress in little; it was scarcely so plump, but it had the advantage in dirt. Had the flooring been of wood, instead of iron, I should have preferred it to my couch. As it was, I had not the courage to undress, and I lay down in my clothes and tried to sleep. Of course I failed; so I collected my candles, stuck them to the floor at my bed-head, and went to work on the newspapers. I read them all—there were five, I think—even to the advertisements; and about five in the morning I dropped off to sleep. In my dreams I was chased, caught, tried, convicted, sentenced, and hanged a hundred times over; and when the warder woke me up I was more than sorry I had slept at all.

II.

‘Seven o’clock,’ said the warder not politely, ‘git up!’ Then, seeing I was dressed, ‘Why,’ he asked, with some temper, ‘what sort of a man do you call yourself to go to sleep in your clothes?’ I evaded the question by telling him that I had dropped off whilst reading; but he caught sight of the blanket under the table, and his wonderment became a kind of stupor. He picked it up, and considered it as one in a dream. ‘Wall,’ he remarked, ‘this heer gits right through me anyway,’ and, with the look of one whose feelings have been hurt, he tossed it on the bed and went away.

There was a bath in the prison for the use of the ‘privileged,’ and in it I got rid of as much of my bed as washing would cleanse away. Breakfast was not till eight, and I had some time before me, so I stepped out upon the gallery, and looked into the court below. It fairly swarmed with people: some lying down, some idling and chatting, some smoking (how nasty the morning tobacco smelt, to be sure!), and some washing themselves at a long stone sink. These men were the poorest of the poor; they fed on the prison fare, and, with the exception of one daily hour of exercise in the yard, they passed the whole of their time in that stone-flagged corridor.

They were not criminals, and therefore did no work; and the idea of thus lounging about, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year even, in enforced idleness, seemed far worse to me than the horrors of hard labour. One was afterwards pointed out to me who had lived this life for sixteen years. His case was singular. Soon after the Civil War he brought a claim against the Government for forty thousand dollars, the value of property destroyed by the Federal troops. The affair excited no particular interest, as at that time dozens of the same sort were being heard and settled every day. He established his claim, received a Government order for the amount, drew the money, and disappeared. Soon afterwards another claimant came forward. The case was heard once more, and then it was discovered that the wrong man had got the money. Detectives were put on the track, and he was run down and arrested. Some thirty thousand dollars were recovered; and he was ordered to pay the remainder and the cost of the investigation (some fifteen thousand dollars in all) into the Treasury. As he had not a rap, he was lodged in Ludlow Street, and has been there ever since. The first time I saw him he was making coffee on a little oil-stove; and the chances are that, could one look in at Ludlow Street at about the same time in the day some five or ten years hence, he would, if still in life, be making coffee still. Fancy taking that man, after sixteen years of idleness, and putting him to hard work! It would kill him in a week.

Breakfast was excellent: there were fish, ham, eggs, hot rolls, and very good tea. I had eaten nothing since four o'clock the day before, so I did full justice to it. We were seven at table—my three acquaintances of the preceding evening, a young fellow I had not seen before (he was an actor, I believe), two Spaniards, and myself. The conversation was limited to a discussion on the relative merits of England and Russia, in which, as a true Briton, I joined. The two Spaniards spoke no word of English, but they took the wildest interest in the argument, and seemed quite sorry when it came to an end and we went into the yard. I suppose all prison yards are alike. The high unbroken walls, like a huge raised shaft cut short off and squared at the top; the nakedness, the grime, the parallelogram of sky above—these features are common to them all. Thus is the yard at Ludlow Street, and here did some of us play base-ball for an hour. During that time three of us got damaged, two with black eyes, and a third—myself—with a sprained ankle. I it was who had

hurt the others, but they bore no malice; they took their punishment like men, especially one, who lay abed with four leeches on his cheek all day. The other sufferer was Ferdinand Ward, and I read that he since got ten years 'hard,' for a course of fraud which shook commercial America, and ruined thousands. In the yard, I should note, I again saw the simple sea-captain. He looked, if possible, simpler and dirtier than last night. I saluted him, and asked him how he liked his quarters. He shook his head, smiled sadly and stupidly, and resumed his walk. Poor simple sea-captain! Is he still in Ludlow Street? If he is, how very simple and how very dirty he must be!

My lawyer's visit was a *solatium*. He pooh-poohed the whole case; he said I should be free in forty minutes by the dial. He happened to be wrong—by some four-and-twenty hours—but he made me happy and confident, and I am grateful to him still. He departed, breathing vengeance and legal terminology; and then I found that our interview had furnished a fellow-captive with food for thought—in a word, had amused him consumedly. He was seated on the opposite form, and he seemed to take the most excited interest in my case. He had gathered from the consultation that I was an Englishman, for he at once addressed me as 'Britisher.' He was a Hebrew, round-shouldered and unwholesome; with very dirty red hair, a prodigious nose, and unhealthy looking ears of the same enormity. His hands, which were stumpy and scarred and filthy, looked like the strips of raw meat one sees on a butcher's sideboard. He reminded me of Fagin—of Fagin in his youth. He discoursed with violence on various topics—the weather, 'our Mary Anderson,' 'your Prince of Wales,' and so forth. He opined that in the event of war with Russia we should be 'knocked out.' He d—d our institutions, he d—d our qualities, he d—d everything that belonged to us, including all our aristocracy and most of our statesmen. 'Your Mr. William Gladstone,' quoth he, 'don't know enough to go out in the rain.' A finer development of the cad I never saw; and, as is natural, I look back upon our conversation with a satisfaction rather heightened than not by the reflection that he must one day get himself hanged.

I asked him the cause of his detention, and he answered in one word, 'Sawdust.' He refused to translate, but a warder, who was less fastidious, and to whom I am eternally obliged, enlightened me. The 'Sawdust Trick' is one of the most ingenious swindles ever concocted by one gang of knaves for the fleecing of

another. The way of it is this: an advertisement appears in some country print:—

SPECULATORS, \$20,000 for \$2,000. Good goods guaranteed. Stuff not to be disposed of in New York State. Address, O. O., Box P. O., N. Y.

Some country sportsman reads, and is taken with the reading. He writes for particulars, an appointment is made, and our rascals get to work. The speculator is taken to a house where he is shown a pile of new five, ten, and twenty-dollar bills. The tradesman takes one from the heap, proposes drinks, and the pair go off to a saloon. There the supposed 'fimsy' is cashed, and the sporting character's last doubts are dispelled at sight of the change. He is enchanted with his bargain, the money fever is on him, and he buys heavily, believing his purchase to be bogus money so well produced as to pass muster anywhere. The bills, which are good, are made up into a neat parcel. He pays his money, receives what he believes to be his package, is seen to the train by one of the gang, and steams on his way rejoicing. It is a condition of sale that he shall not open the package by the way, and he has perforce to smile in ignorance till he reaches his journey's end. He hurries home, rushes to his room, locks the door, cuts the string, rips open the paper, and discovers—a cardboard box stuffed with sawdust! The safety of the swindlers lies in their number. No one man does two things, and hence the difficulty of detection. One rascal sends the advertisement, another calls for the letters, another opens and reads them, another answers them, another meets the speculator at the station, another shows him the pile of bills, and so on. The speculator, of course, has no redress. He intended fraud, and he can only curse his luck and burn the sawdust. Meanwhile the advertising continues, the game goes merrily on, and the chances are that every post brings grist to the long firm's mill.

At twelve next day my lawyer told me I was free. I bade those good-bye whom I knew, and limped to the wicket. I was stopped by the bailiff with a little account for ten dollars, the costs of my arrest. I paid it, of course, and the next minute I was in the street. It struck me as odd that a perfectly innocent man should have to pay for being arrested and sent to gaol. I am pleased, as a good Englishman, to reflect that on this side the water I can, if so disposed, enjoy the luxury for nothing.

MY NURSERY REVISITED.

My nursery is a little old-world village nestling in a hollow amid the Berkshire wolds. I was five years old when last I saw the place; but so tenderly has time dealt with it, that, save I see it as through a telescope reversed, the picture I have carried in memory for a quarter of a century is faithful to the reality of to-day. And truly there is little change. The railway has cut its path through the hillside and raised a huge embankment across the valley, but its invasion has not awakened H—— from her pastoral slumber. She scorns the rope civilisation has thrown to her and drifts along in her groove of agriculture, secure in the lack of possibilities which might tempt enterprise to disturb her peace.

In the foreground of my picture of H—— stood the house I knew best—the ivy-covered vicarage, my cradle. What a noble mansion memory held it! Having grown from three feet high to six the picture needs corresponding alteration; the house I had in mind was twice the size of this; those lofty, spiked railings dwindle down to the merest fence, and the spacious front garden disappears in a strip of gravel walk. Only the shrubs remain true; because they have changed and grown up with me; but that luxuriant Virginia creeper, which outshines the ivy, looks like a wig over a familiar face.

Within the vicarage, once my eye is reconciled to the reduced scale, every corner calls up a flood of memories, clear-cut, blurred, and dim. This is the night-nursery, where Mrs. Eales, our nurse, ruled with a hair-brush as with a rod of iron; a queer feeling akin to funk creeps down my back now as I look round the room. I feel the rap of Mrs. Eales's bony knuckles on my head, and shudder at the sight of a brush such as that, with whose flat side ——! A glance at the washstand so vividly recalls the agony of morning ablutions as administered by her hands, that my eyes smart again; with a bit of yellow soap and a rough towel that nurse could inflict unspeakable tortures; she gave me a distaste for washing I retained for years. The day-nursery is a bed-room now, and every stick of the old furniture is gone, but I spent far too many days here to have forgotten it. There, in that

corner, my little brother laid the seeds of a life-long feud by smashing my sailor doll. I have forgiven him now, but I can never forget the tragedy; the stolid indifference wherewith the one-year-old destroyer regarded the mangled corpse we drew from the grate with the nursery dust-pan; the tears my sympathetic sister mingled with mine when the case was pronounced hopeless; and, above all, the redeeming joy of the funeral we gave the saw-dustless remains next day. The whole affair comes back vividly as though it were only yesterday I was playing here on the floor, and I catch myself peering towards the open cupboard to see if my big Noah's Ark is still in its place on the bottom shelf.

A stone's throw—quite a long walk it used to be—from the vicarage gate stands the old grey church among the decrepit, lichened tombstones; nothing of its outward face has changed. There, on the stunted square tower, still twirls in legless, much-tailed brilliancy, the gilded cock I used to covet for a plaything, and the swallows' nests occupy their identical old nooks. But within, restoration—much needed, they tell me—has laid its transforming finger on all old acquaintances. Gone is the black oak, three-decker pulpit, with its queer sounding-board; vanished are the rows of wooden hatpegs which ran along the walls; nor does a trace remain of the old-fashioned, high-backed pews. I wish they had left the big, square pew which belonged to the vicarage; I remember its faded blue cushions so well. It was my especial privilege to stand on the seat during the hymns if I had been 'good' during the whole of the previous week; but, inasmuch as the occasions on which I enjoyed this valued prerogative stand out like landmarks, I am forced to conclude that my moral behaviour in those days left much to be desired.

Visitors to H—— are very rare, I imagine. When I interviewed the baker's wife, to whom I was recommended to apply for lodgings, that excellent woman regarded my intention to stay a month or so in the village with doubting concern. Anxious to disabuse her mind of the idea that I was a fugitive from justice, I explained that my early childhood had been passed in H——, and that a sentimental yearning to see the place again had brought me hither. Mrs. Marsh is a comparatively recent settler in the village, so further explanations were entailed. My appearance assumed the magnitude of an Event; and before the baker's apprentice had brought my portmanteau from the station, whither he had been sent with his wheelbarrow, the entire populace had

been thrilled with the news. There are many old servants and retainers of the vicar of twenty-five years ago still resident in the village, and from the hour of my arrival I breathed an atmosphere of reminiscence almost embarrassing in its personality. There is Louisa, our sometime nursemaid, for instance. She is respectfully anxious to learn whether I remember once telling her I was too fat to lace my own boots? Whether I recall the days when I used to kiss her? (O Louisa, Louisa! Thou art but forty to-day and comely!) Whether the sight of porridge still moves me to tears? And do I retain my infant passion for raw bacon? Louisa loves to linger over these interesting details, and our daily meetings at the post-office, where at noon many do congregate to inspect the mail-bag, afford her opportunities of putting me to the blush, upon which she pounces with an eagerness that has something almost uncanny about it. I do not believe there is now in H—— a soul who does not know I once kicked the shins of John Wells, the groom-gardener, because he, in the execution of his duty, had slain a pig to which I was deeply attached; and the village children point at me as he who appeared in the public road wearing the Sunday bonnet of the then vicarage cook, and who was chastised for putting the cat into the dough. Lapse of time seems to have invested such early imbecilities with a halo of touching romance, but I am made to feel that I am in H—— a marked man. I suppose three active children left in charge of an indulgent guardian for three years could scarcely have failed to make their presence felt and remembered in a village like this; we seem to have left an indelible impression, at all events, and perhaps it is natural that old acquaintances should take up the thread where it was broken off. Sally, the washer-woman, does not realise how many years have passed since she saw me last. Sally is eighty-two, an age when the years are as drops in Time's ocean, and she talks of the days twenty-five years ago as though it were but a week or two since I pleaded for a taste of her blackberry jam. A charming old woman is Sally; hale, intelligent, and wonderfully well informed, as delightful an example of the English cottager as one might find throughout the length and breadth of the land.

But the H—— of memory is fast fading into oblivion in the light of renewed acquaintance; and the village I have for so long pictured is become a prosaic reality, whose chiefest interest centres in the cottage where I have taken up my quarters. Mr.

Marsh, the baker, is an elderly man of severe demeanour, who defies all overtures by the impregnability of his reserve; uncommunicative he is and stern. Proud too: on the day I came to dwell under his roof I went into the shop for a box of matches, and offered a halfpenny in payment. Mr. Marsh eyed the coin gloomily, sniffed faintly, and said, 'Put that in your pocket!' with the air of a Rothschild suffering from acute neuralgia. I, crushed and humiliated, crept away, matches and halfpenny in hand. He makes excellent bread though, does this majestic baker; and if he deigns to feed his own pigs and poultry by day, he redeems his self-respect by burning the midnight oil over the works of Sir Walter Scott. I fear I shall never know Mr. Marsh. I should like to; I feel sure he is a man with a history. Mrs. Marsh is a quiet, soft-spoken little woman, who has, I think, seen better days; she endeared herself to me on our first meeting by the keen anxiety she displayed to charge moderately, and has since won my heart by the perfection of her pastry and motherly regard for my comfort. Her eagerness to do things in becoming style is almost painful; if a wasp dare trespass in the honey or a fly presume to commit suicide in the cream, Mrs. Marsh pours forth an oration of apology no reassurances can check. One memorable morning she boiled and brought to table an egg of undesirable quality; we had quite a scene; could the responsible hen have been traced, its life had not been worth a moment's purchase.

Whilst I was alone, Mrs. Marsh tended me herself; but when my two sisters joined me, she found it necessary to engage assistance. Her choice fell upon a village maiden, who answers to the name of Pollyemily, and whose performances constitute irrefutable evidence of the truth of her statement, that she has never been 'out at service' before. As a waitress she may be lacking in skill, but we would not part with her for three of the most accomplished table-maids in England; for Pollyemily's ministrations lend a zest to life. There is about our handmaiden a cheerful buoyancy, which makes it a positive pleasure to see her drop a dish; she possesses a fertility of resource, unhampered by conventionality, which keep us in a chronic state of interested speculation. We can never guess into what difficulty she may flounder next, nor hazard a surmise as to the method she will adopt to get out of it. She is brimming over with a vigorous originality, which invests her every movement with piquant charm. The advent of Pollyemily

with afternoon tea is quite one of the events of the day. The cough she substitutes for the orthodox knock at the door gives warning, and we clear out of the way to leave space for her manoeuvres. First, the door-handle rattles violently, as though someone in falling had clutched at it; and the clatter of crockery is followed by a crash. Then silence for a moment. Another grab at the handle, more rattling of cups, and the door creaks dangerously in answer to the muffled lurch of a heavy body against it. Again momentary silence, broken by breathless panting; a third spasmodic snatch half releases the lock, and a heavier pitching against the panels bursts the door open. A large, flat boot-heel, surmounted by grey worsted stocking, leads the way, as with one long, backward stride Pollyemily falls into the room; she 'brings up' against the piano, swings round, and surveys us over the *débris* on the tray with a triumphant 'Here-we-are-again!' smile. She puts her burden down—somewhere; on the floor for choice—and bustles cheerfully away to collect the spoons and toast in the passage.

We dare not attempt to assist her by opening the door in answer to that cough. I did so once. Pollyemily was in the very act of hurling herself against it, and the result was most disastrous. Safety dictates that we should offer her no aid, save in the shape of advice, and that only at carefully selected moments. Her education is making great strides already, though; she never now attempts to remove the breakfast things *en masse* in the table-cloth, and if she does place the potatoes on the floor during dinner, it's the rarest possible thing for her to put her foot in the dish by mistake. She has learned, too, that her mouth is not the proper place to put a spoon when her hands are full; no, she stows it under her arm or in her pocket.

Opportunities of teaching her the mysteries of social usage occur hourly, but we do not always feel able to turn them to account. One afternoon a lady called upon my sisters, and, hearing they were out, tendered cards to Pollyemily.

'Thank'ee, mum,' I overheard that young woman say, in accents of gratified pride. 'Thank'ee, mum, *very* much.'

We have not had the heart to ask for those pasteboards, and I doubt not Pollyemily counts them still among her most cherished possessions.

We value our handmaiden as affording the only excitement which leavens the otherwise unruffled calm of our existence here.

The week from end to end is one long Sunday, and a more secluded spot wherein to dream away the summer would be hard to find. There are few people, other than cottagers, in and about the village, and the absence of most adjuncts of civilised life proves how little man really wants of all he is wont to consider indispensable. There is no butcher's shop within many miles, and the daily paper comes from Newbury; we have neither library nor barber in H—, and I never heard a resident complain of the lack of one or the other. Mr. Marsh's establishment fulfils all purposes; it is a kind of co-operative stores in miniature, and so convenient do we find it that I tremble for the time when I shall no longer live under the same roof with a general shop. If you break your boot-lace and want another; if Pollyemily drop the sardine-tin upside down at lunch; if hunger suggest a biscuit, or darkness demand candles, all you need do is, take three steps down the passage, dodge under the festoons of clothes-line and hobnailed boots, and there you are in the midst of plenty. If Mr. Marsh chance to be presiding at the counter, you take what you want and meekly request him to name and accept the cost. If, as is usually the case, the cat is in sole charge, you help yourself, and put what you think ought to be the price in the till; the only drawback attendant upon this being a certain liability to overcharge yourself, unless you are acquainted with 'market prices' current in H—.

The shop with which the post-office is amalgamated ranks next to Mr. Marsh's emporium in point of importance; it owes nothing to its legitimate stock-in-trade (which consists, so far as I have been able to ascertain, of half a barrel of potatoes and a box of writing-paper), but bases its claim to our respect on its headquarters of Her Majesty's mails. There is a one-leggedness about our post-office which is very typical of H—; for instance, you can purchase 'postal orders' there, when they happen to be in stock, but for some occult reason the authorities deny us the privilege of obtaining payment for such. In other respects, business is conducted with an artless simplicity which trenches on the irregular, but is calculated to meet the public convenience. The methods adopted might create chaos elsewhere, but, in a place where the incoming mail averages five letters and a newspaper, occasional deviations from strict official routine are unattended by any evil results. William, our postmaster, is a hearty, laughter-loving young fellow of three-and-eighty; he has still one tooth

left, and makes light of a ten-mile walk. William is a bit of a character; Nature made him a bibliomaniac, but Fate ordained he should pursue the calling of a clockmaker, whence the singular medley which lends dusty interest to his shop. By regular attendance at all the auction sales which take place within reach, he has possessed himself of a large and varied assortment of odd volumes, into whose contents he never pries before purchase or after, and for which he will entertain any reasonable offer. The local demand for literature, however, is out of all proportion to the diligence wherewith William continues to increase his library, and the counter of the post-office is well-nigh inaccessible by reason of the piles of musty tomes heaped casually on the floor. The vast majority of the books date from the last century, and the forgotten works of forgotten divines rub covers with long-expired magazines and nameless novels, whose stout bindings have long outlived their fame. I bought a complete copy of Milton's works for fourpence, and was pressed to accept nine volumes of an old encyclopædia at the modest figure of one and six. 'There's a deal of reading in 'em,' said William, wistfully, 'and I wa-ants to get 'em off the chair.' But the encyclopædia still occupied the only chair in the shop when I went to bid the proprietor adieu. H—— is deplorably blind to its opportunities for culture and self-improvement.

I imagine that an affectionate recollection of his old craft, degenerated into a species of diseased sentiment, is the feeling which prompts William to offer his premises as an asylum for decrepit and incurable clocks. Lying among the books, upstanding like melancholy lighthouses, and buried, as dead timekeepers should be, are numbers of battered old clocks, varying in size and style from the 'grandfather,' six feet high, to the 'cuckoo.' William professes careless ignorance as to how he 'coom by them,' and is impatient of question on the topic; but while he regards with callous indifference the accidents which occasionally reduce a clock to more total wreck, he puts aside all propositions to buy with an oracular shake of the head and pensive smile.

Our life at H—— were most graphically described by blank pages, so uneventful is its course. My diary bears eloquent testimony to the suitability of the place for anyone for whom 'perfect quiet and freedom from excitement' have been prescribed. The following entries owe their being to an unusually idle morning and a crude taste for experiment on porcine appetite:

September 4.—Struck by abnormal appetite of junior pig. Tested capacity with apples. Pig ate twenty-nine; retired beaten half-way through No. 30.

September 5.—Pig seems unwell.

September 6.—Continued indifferent health of pig attracts Mr. M.'s attention; feel rather uneasy; apples (?)

September 7.—Pig seriously indisposed. Medical Board, William, Mr. M., and self, assemble at sty. Unanimously resolved that 'go of ile' be administered. (Query: What, and how much, is 'go of ile'?)

September 8.—Pig better.

September 9.—Wet day. Mrs. Marsh reports pig doing well.

Never, I venture to assert, in the history of pork, has a sick pig been the recipient of such sincere attention as we lavished upon this one of the baker's. His ultimate recovery deprived us of a really valuable subject of conversation. It may gratify believers in the higher intelligence of the pig to learn that, from the day of this invalid's restoration to health, he disdained the rosiest apple we could set before him; he pushed it irritably aside, and watched his companion eat it with thoughtful grunts, in which imagination detected a note of cynical warning.

What an amusing bird the domestic fowl is, by the way. Her usual demeanour suggests a profundity of self-satisfied wisdom undiscoverable in any other member of the feathered race; and this same air of preternatural sagacity veils a wealth of foolishness which might provoke the scornful smile of a gosling. Her gullibility in the matter of 'nest eggs' throws a lurid light upon her true character. How in the world a hen of any experience can be deceived into self-gratulation and advertisement by so paltry a fraud is a perpetual puzzle to me. Over and over again I have caught Mrs. Marsh's best Brahma clucking the praises of a lump of chalk so chipped and stained that you would never suspect it capable of imposing on the youngest chicken; yet this fowl, which, I understand, has for three summers laid five eggs a week, gloats over the sorry imposture time after time in the triumphant conviction she has just 'laid' it herself. She really ought to know better at her age; but what can you expect from a bird so puffed up with fatuous conceit? Watch her for a while as she strolls about the neighbourhood of the back door. Her deportment is dignified to solemnity; her carriage studied as that of a dancing-master; now and then she pauses in her stately walk, and with

one foot uplifted and her head on one side gazes into vacancy with a wrapt intentness that hints consideration of some abstruse problem in philosophy or science—as a matter of fact she is looking out for kitchen scraps. You say, ‘Shoo!’ Her head goes over to the other side and her foot comes to ground. ‘Cluck-cluck! Did you call me? Cul-luck! I know that is Indian corn in your hand, but I don’t think I care about it. Cluck-cluck! You can’t take *me* in, you know. Cluck-cluck! Cul-la-a-rek!!!’ Dignity melts away, and she is bowling forward with outspread wings to devour the handful of nothing you throw, before any other fowl comes to share it. A searching scrutiny of the cobble stones and a peck or two, and she is gazing heavenward again. ‘Cul-luck?’ interrogatively. ‘Cul-luck? Very singular; no corn here; it must have fallen up instead of down, but I don’t see it in the sky anywhere. Very odd indeed. Cul-luck!’ And she wanders away to the ash-pit to think it over; here she scratches with spasmodic energy among the rubbish, but with a preoccupied air meant to convey that she indulges in scarification merely as an aid to thought.

It is an ungrateful task to tear up by the roots the most carefully implanted teachings of one’s childhood; but how in the name of consistency came the turtle-dove to be selected as a synonym for gentleness and amiability? Here in H——, five-and-twenty years ago, we were taught to regard this bird as the model upon whose behaviour we ought to mould our own; its affectionate and forgiving disposition was painted in colours to which words can do no justice, and we looked upon the turtledove with a reverential awe untinged by suspicion. It has been reserved for me until now to learn how utterly undeserved was the character wherewith nursery legend invested the turtle-dove, for here I enjoy opportunities of studying him—and her—which have been hitherto denied me. You have only to scatter a few morsels of biscuit before them to bring out their true colours. With one consent they dash at the biggest bit and quarrel for it with a whole-hearted viciousness that would shock a fox-terrier; the strongest or luckiest secures the prize and bolts it whole, with a promptness which betrays his opinion of his companions. How well-founded that opinion is you quickly discover; to snatch the food from his neighbour’s beak, and swallow it himself before a third party can misappropriate it, is the first article of turtle-dove creed. Grasping selfishness and bitter jealousy are his most promi-

nent characteristics, and he is never at peace unless he is quarrelling. He is, I admit, a devoted mate, but not more so than any other bird: the flouted cock-sparrow is quite as assiduous in his attentions to his wife, but receives no credit, simply because he is not perpetually calling public notice to his goings on. There lies the whole secret in fact; on the slender strength of a soft voice we have dubbed the turtle-dove a paragon, oblivious of the detail that his seductive 'coo' is oftenest raised in ornithological Billingsgate.

Mrs. Marsh, whose inventive faculties are ever busy devising means for us to kill time, diffidently placed at our disposal on 'off-days' the pony and cart attached to the bakery. She was diffident, being fearful lest the suggestion that we should drive a conveyance so conspicuously the property of 'Marsh, Baker, H——,' should hurt our feelings. But we dispelled all such ideas by the promptness of our acceptance, and at once planned a series of drives to the 'places of interest' in the neighbourhood. We only went out three times, however; the cart was limp about the springs, and the pony was of a markedly deliberate temperament; but these were trifles by which we would never have been deterred. What brought our excursions to a close was the dogmatic conscientiousness of our steed; to pass, without halting, a gate at which he was accustomed to stop, was a breach of duty nothing would induce him to commit; and, as Mr. Marsh's customers in and about H—— are numerous, this unfaltering fidelity was trying. At first, indeed, we made light of it; enjoyed the astonishment of cottagers who came out to receive the loaves we had not brought, and lavished praises on the retentive memory of the pony. We humoured him and treated his eccentricity with almost respectful indulgence. But when, one very wet evening, we being hungry and late for dinner, the brute insisted on one or other of us getting down and pretending to deliver bread at six different cottages in one half-mile of muddiest lane before he would consent to proceed, we voted such narrow-minded intelligence a bore, and renounced carriage exercise thenceforward.

I had always been under the impression that a village wedding partook of the nature of a rustic festival; that it was a pretty, pastoral scene, in which hearty rejoicing and floral display shed an appropriate halo over the union of the two fond hearts. Hence, when William one morning suggested that I should wait at the post-office and see the wedding about to be celebrated in the church

just opposite, I congratulated myself on the opportunity and thanked the old man warmly for his notice. 'They're to be married,' said William, 'at eleven o'clock; th' passon's awaitin' now.'

The hands on the black dial in the church-tower already pointed to ten minutes past the hour, but, though a number of young people were lingering round the gate, there was no sign of the principals. 'They be awaitin',' said William reassuringly. 'That's hur and hur fa-arther in the ca-ahner. They be awaitin' for the groom.'

His finger directed my eye to a corner of the churchyard where, upon a flat tombstone, sat a young woman and an elderly man; neither their dress nor bearing gave any clue to the nature of the ceremony before them. Papa, with his hands in the pockets of his corduroys, meditatively chewed a straw, and the bride-elect swung her crossed feet to and fro carelessly, now and again exchanging a word with the group at the distant gate. Ten minutes passed and the clerk came to the church-door to inquire if the party were not ready.

'*E baint a-coom yet,'* replied Papa. 'Be I to go and fetch 'e along?'

The clerk approved; the proud parent shuffled off the tombstone and, advancing to the churchyard gate, looked up and down the road. The missing link was not in sight, so, with an impatient grunt, Papa turned in the direction of the 'White Hart.' Presently he returned, followed by a young labourer, whose delay was doubtless due to the difficulty he had found in persuading two double dahlias to stick in each button-hole. His appearance was gay, if not brilliant, but he kept any feelings of enthusiasm he may have entertained under admirable control. Arrived at the church-door, Papa paused, shouted 'Hi!' to his daughter, and ushered the pair into the porch with his hat, much as though folding wayward sheep. The ceremony was soon over, and the last I saw of the wedding-party was its procession in Indian file into the 'White Hart.' There was a crude simplicity about the whole affair which was more original than attractive, and I am loth to believe it a representative example of a rural wedding.

But, after all, when we lift a corner of the curtain which hides the home-life of the agricultural labourer, so prosaic an entry upon the married state appears only in harmony with the future. Are the clash of wedding-bells and feasting of neighbours the fittest beginning for the new life of harder toil upon which he enters almost

at the church-door? No gentle gliding down the golden strand of 'honeymoon' launches the hind upon the treacherous sea of matrimony. He goes to the altar to-day, and to-morrow's sun rises upon him trudging back to the fields to earn for two the bread it has been hard enough to find hitherto for one. Work in which he can take no interest, alternating with idleness he does not enjoy, make up the sum of his colourless existence; but he asks no sympathy; his world is bounded by the horizon, and he is blind to all beyond the confines of his own parish. A rare visit to the market-town and the half-yearly appearance of the travelling cheap-jack, with his van-load of varied wares, form his landmarks of time. Given enough to eat and drink, and a corner in the 'White Hart' on his missus's washing-day, he is content. Knowing little he wants little; and surely Wisdom on ten shillings a week were Folly indeed.

In vain have I sought the agricultural labourer known to politicians—that keen-eyed, intelligent man, whose rude eloquence contrasts so strangely with his untrimmed finger-nails and patched pantaloons, and whose eagerness to discuss the Allotment Question and beneficial legislation holds the sympathetic stranger spell-bound on the cottage doorstep. Perhaps H——, in her lagging behind the times, is less advanced than other rural villages, for I could not find that labourer, though I searched every heart pints of beer and pipes of tobacco could render accessible. Dubious nails and ragged pantaloons there were in plenty; a sense that higher wages would be acceptable was universal; that farmers could not afford to pay more was almost equally widely acknowledged. But beyond the narrow boundary of these closely personal interests all was dense, impenetrable mist. I found no 'opinions,' advanced or otherwise; no eloquence; not even a vague hunger for acres and cows. Party government was no more than a name to these contentedly unenlightened rustics; the coloured lithograph portrait of the Queen, which adorned many a cottage wall, embodied the owner's idea of Authority, and the existence of any other between Her Majesty and the landlord was a vague fact, admitted only to be ignored. Let anyone who believes this a libel investigate for himself; let him go to some other such out-of-the-way village as this and take the adult population man by man into confidential chat; much that now perplexes his political soul will then, I warrant him, become plain.

And now the day draws near when, for the second time, I am to

leave my nursery. The present fades out of sight a while, and I recall the last departure hence, when strangers they told me were my parents came to take me away.

It is Sunday evening. I am in the vicarage garden saying good-bye to the dog and cat overnight, lest I shall have no time to spare before the early start to-morrow morning. The exciting prospect of a railway journey does little to qualify the sorrow of parting from the animals, my tailless bantam and my own particular garden down by the pond. That I am to leave for ever the kind old vicar and his daughter who have been as parents to me is more than I can realise. I am about to leave the only 'home' I have ever known, and with a strange father and mother; 'life' lies behind; I know no farther future than to-morrow, and it seems as though the end of all things were come.

Again it is Sunday and evening. I am standing on the same spot under the copper-beech on the vicarage lawn; the bells are ringing for service, and from the school-house down the road comes faintly the echo of children's voices chanting the evening hymn. I cannot choose but listen, and listening I am five years old once more, leaving my nursery for the unknown. The bells have stopped. Bedtime; I must go in.

CHARACTER NOTE.

INTELLECTA.

Qui vit sans folie n'est pas si sage qu'il ne le croit.

It is not the intellect itself that is objectionable. In fact, intellect is an excellent thing. It is a better thing than genius for practical domestic purposes. For genius is apt to be a nuisance. It always gets up late, and it is not particular about its bath. It is not at all practical, and the tradesmen fail to understand it. No, the fault seems to lie in the use that Intellecta makes of her mind—not in the mind itself.

There is a story about a Scotchman who introduced his native thistle into some colony where the soil was rich and the rainfall—it is to be presumed—bounteous. Nothing but thistle grows in that country now, and the Scotchman has left.

Some imprudent woman has been busy introducing intellect and other things into the female mind, and, like the thistle, it is beginning to spread.

Intellecta made her first appearance to our delighted vision at a certain town on the Cam where certain young women have most distinctly and unblushingly followed certain young men. Intellecta attended lectures which were not intended for Intellecta's delicate ears, and we were forced to blush—merely because she would not do so.

She dragged her hair back from a brow which would have looked better beneath a feminine fringe, and while the lecturer lectured she leant this brow upon a large firm hand. She was preternaturally grave, and there was a certain harassed go-ahead look in her eyes, before which some of us quailed. We were young then. The lecturer was an elderly gentleman of the unabashed type. 'And now, gentlemen,' he said from time to time, which was rude, because it ignored Intellecta. But she did not appear to notice. She leant that rounded, pensive brow on her hand, and simply lapped up knowledge. One could see it bulging out of the pensive brow unbecomingly all round. The dragged-back hair gave her head a distended, uncomfortable look, as if it was suffering from mental indigestion.

Intellecta's father was a well-known dissenting minister in a large manufacturing town. He knew the value of learning, on the principle that the pauper knows best the value of money, and he sent Intellecta to a high school. She graduated, or whatever they do at high schools, and obtained a scholarship. There was no small rejoicing in a chaste, dissenting way; and very few people knew that only three girls had entered for the scholarship. One retired and had measles, and another, Intellecta's sole rival, lost her nerve and wept when she saw the algebra paper. And Intellecta simply cantered in.

What Intellecta did not know in the way of knowledge was not worth knowing after she took that scholarship. What she knows now is less worth knowing because she seems to have turned none of it to practical account yet. But some one once said that Knowledge may come while Wisdom lingers.

From the very first Intellecta's only joy was an examination paper. She studied these in the privacy of her own apartment. She walked down Petty Cury with bundles of them under her arm. All her learning was acquired from an examination point of view. She did not want to be learned, she wanted to pass examinations. Her knowledge nearly approached to cunning. Moreover, she passed her examinations. She exceeded her father's fondest desires. She dashed our highest hopes to the ground.

She continued to attend lectures, surrounded now by a guardian atmosphere of learning. We felt that she despised us more than ever. We felt that she saw through us and knew that we were only grinding in order to please our fathers or with an ultimate view of gaining a living. Whereas she was working for something higher and nobler—to wit, the emancipation of women—the march of intellect. All the while her hair receded farther and farther back from her brow as if the march of intellect entailed pushing through tight places.

'We are progressing,' we heard her say in a deep masculine voice to a lady with short grey hair in King's Cross Station. Short grey hair is, by the way, sometimes conducive to cold shivers down the Philistine back. 'We are progressing. We are getting our feet upon the ladder.'

And good serviceable understandings they were, with square toes. That was the last of her so far as Cambridge was concerned.

From that time her walk was upon the broader stage of life.

We met her again at an intellectual gathering in a picture gallery, where she came suddenly round a corner upon two young persons of a different sex discussing ices and other pleasant things, away from the busy hum of debate.

Intellecta sniffed. We rather liked her for it—because it was a remnant as it were of a vanishing femininity. The question that evening was one of political economy: How were we, in fact, assembled in a picture gallery in Piccadilly, to reduce the population of China? Intellecta was great. She proved mathematically that things were really coming to a pretty pass. If China was allowed to go on in this reckless way, its teeming population would simply overwhelm the world. At this point an old gentleman woke up and said ‘Hear, hear!’ And immediately afterwards ‘Don’t, Maria!’ which induced one to believe that he had been led to see the error of his ways.

Intellecta spoke for twenty-five minutes in a deep emotional voice, and when she had finished there was a singular feeling in the atmosphere of being no further on. She had spoken for twenty-five minutes, but she had not said much.

Other people spoke with a similar result. They were apparently friends of Intellecta’s, who clubbed together to hear each other speak, and on certain evenings they invited the benighted to come and listen. We soon reduced the population of China, by carrying a few motions in that picture gallery in Piccadilly. And there are people who hold that it is useless to educate women, even in face of such grand results as this.

‘Of course,’ Intellecta was overheard to say at a dinner-table the other evening, ‘of course, Dr. Kudos may be a great man. I do not say that he is not. I went into dinner with him the other evening; I tried him on several subjects, and I cannot say that he had much that was new to tell me upon any one of them.’

That is the sort of person she is. She is fearless and open. She would question the learning of Gibbon on matters Roman, if that reverend historian was not beyond her reach. The grasp of her mind is simply enormous. She will take up, say, political economy, study it for a couple of months, and quite master it. She is then ready, nay anxious, to lay down the law upon matters politico-economical in a mixed assembly. If she is in the room, her deep emotional voice may indeed generally be heard, laying down the law upon some point or another.

Languages she masters *en passant*. She learnt French tho-

roughly in five weeks, in order to read a good translation of one of Tolstoi's novels. She had not time for Russian, she said—she had not time—that was all. Having acquired the tongue of the lightsome Gaul, she proceeded one evening to discourse in it to a gentleman who had no English, and the Frenchman was apparently struck dumb by awe—possibly at her learning.

Intellecta is now getting on towards middle age, as, alas! are some who sat with her in a lecture-room near the Cam. She still has the go-ahead look: there are one or two grey hairs among those dragged back from her forehead; and a keen observer—one who has known her all along—may detect in her spectacled eyes a subtle dissatisfaction. Can it be that Intellecta has been born before her time? It would almost seem that the world is not quite ripe for her yet. She is full of learning—she has much to say upon all subjects—she is a great teacher. But why that mystic smile behind the spectacles of Dr. Kudos?

'She only repeats,' he will say gently to men only (such as her father's Wednesday evening Bible-classes). 'She only teaches what she has been taught. She is only a talking book.'

The old gentleman may be right. There may be something in him, although Intellecta could not find it. For he has seen many men and many things in books and elsewhere. It may be that Intellecta can only teach what she has been taught. And what she has learnt at Cambridge, Whitechapel does not want to hear. What she has seen at Whitechapel is odoriferous in the nostrils of Cambridge.

That dissatisfied look haunts us sometimes, when we think of the men who laughed at Intellecta when she attended her first lecture. Some of those men are celebrated now—some are leading lights at the bar—others are pillars of the Church; the rest of us are merely prosperous and happy. We have quite forgotten to be learned. But Intellecta is where she was. She is still a learned woman. She is still looking for an outlet for all that knowledge which is within her brain, which has never germinated—which she has not been able to turn to account.

Intellecta despises women who have husbands and babies and no aspirations. She despises still more perhaps those who dream vaguely of the encumbrances mentioned; but even some whose dreams never can be realised have not the look that Intellecta has in her eyes.

She is very busy. She addresses meetings of factory girls in

the Mile End Road, and she will tell you in her deep tones that she is due in Bradford to-morrow evening, where a great work is being carried on. She is always improving her mind during the intervals snatched from the work of telling others to go and do likewise. She still finds time to drop in on a science and master it. The old familiar curse of the lecture-room is still upon her; and she still laps up, eagerly, knowledge which the limited male intellect is inclined to think she would be better without. But it is not for the sake of the knowledge that she seeks it. It is the old story of the examination paper over again.

Her chief aim in life is to forward the cause of education. She is one of the prime movers in the great schemes for bringing knowledge to the masses—instead of letting the masses come and take it. She may be seen at cheap lectures in the suburbs in an ill-fitting cloth dress, leaning that heavy brow on the large firm hand, drinking in the lecturer's periods.

She does not go to church very much. She complains that the clergy are deficient in intellectual power. There is a vague mystery overhanging her religious tenets. She has learnt too much. It is often so with women. One finds that as soon as they know more than the local curate they begin to look down upon St. Paul, and Paley, and good Bishop Butler, and a few others who may not have been intellectual as the word is understood to-day, but who, nevertheless, wrote some solid stuff.

Intellecta is not a tragedy. Not by any means. She would be indignant at the thought. She is naturally of a grave temperament—all great thinkers are. She is quite devoid of any sense of the ridiculous, which is a great blessing—for Intellecta. She is profoundly convinced that she is an interesting woman. She feels at the cheap lectures that local young women of mind nudge each other and ask who she is. She trusts they will profit by her example, and in time they may perhaps acquire her power of concentration—they may in time learn to bring their whole mind as she brings hers (a much larger affair) to bear upon the question in hand. She does not know that they are commenting on her clothing and longing for the lecture to be over that they may walk home with a person who is waiting for them outside.

There is no one waiting for Intellecta outside—not even a cabman.

Being devoid of humour, she is naturally without knowledge of the pathetic, and therefore she does not see herself as others see

her. She is probably unaware of that dissatisfied look in her eyes. It is a physical matter, like a wrinkle or a droop of the lips. It is the little remnant of the woman quailing before the mind.

'Knowledge is power,' she always says when driven into a corner by some argumentative and mistaken man.

'Yes, but it is not happiness,' Dr. Kudos replies—not to her, but to a friend of his own sex; 'and we are put here to try and be happy.'

'We are making progress,' says Intellecta still. 'We are getting our feet upon the ladder.'

Yes, Intellecta; but whither does that ladder lead?

A WIDOW'S TALE.

BY MRS. OLIPHANT.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE were excuses for him; he had been interrupted, and he had come back to have it out, to tell his tale, to make his declaration. Mrs. Glynn, who was quite cool and impartial, not bewildered by excitement like Nelly, thought so. But then she had not that heavy sense of something else—some things said that ought not to have been said—which crushed Nelly's heart like a stone. 'Was it indispensable that he should catch the last train? Had she not expected him back—left the window open for him?' If Mrs. Glynn had known of these words, would she have still thought there were excuses? Nelly's heart lay in her breast like a stone. The scientific people may say what they will—that the heart is a mere physical organ; not those who have felt it ache, who have felt it leap, who have felt it lie like a stone. There seemed no beating in it, no power of rising. She said to herself that she was relieved and comforted, and thanked God that, to a calm spectator, there were excuses for him. But her heart did not respond; it lay motionless in her breast, crushed, heavy as a stone.

She did not, however, leave the house all that day, expecting, yet not expecting, the visit which should put everything right, of which her friend had been so confident; but he did not come. Next morning there arrived a letter, full of agitation and bewilderment to Nelly. It was not the apology, the prayer for forgiveness, which she had expected. The letter took a totally different tone. He accused Nelly—poor Nelly, trembling and miserable—of distrust, which was an insult to him. What did she think of him that she had fled from him, turned him over to a servant? What horrible idea had she formed of him? What did she expect or imagine?

'I have often been told,' he wrote, 'that women in their imaginations jumped at things that would horrify a man: but I never believed it, least of all of you. What could be more simple or more natural, than to go back to the house of my only friend—to one more dear to me than any other friend—instead of walking to

London, which was my only alternative? What dreadful things have people put into your head? for they would not arise there of themselves, I feel sure. And now here we have come to a crisis which changes our relationship altogether. How are we to get over it? My first thought was to rush off at once—to put the Channel between us—so that you might feel safe; but something tugs at my heart, and I cannot put myself out of reach of you whatever you may think of me. O Nelly! where did you learn those suspicions that are so insulting to me? How can I come again with the recollection of all that in my mind? Do you wish me to come again? Do you want to cast me off? What is to happen between us? After the insult you have put upon me, it is for you to take the next step. I am here at your orders—to come or to stay.'

Nelly was struck dumb by this letter. She did not know what to think or to say. A simple-minded person, not accustomed to knavery, has always the first impulse of believing what is said to her (or him), whatever she may know against it. How could she tell, a woman so little acquainted with life, whether he might not be in the right—whether he had not cause to feel insulted and offended? If his motives were so transparent and his action so simple as he thought, he had indeed good reason to be offended—and for a moment there was a sensation of relief and comfort indescribable in Nelly's heart. Ah! that these vile things which had given her so much pain had not risen again like straws upon an evil wind, and blown about her, confusing all her thoughts! Not indispensable that he should catch the last train—he who treated this incident now as so inevitable, so simple an occurrence! And had she not expected him to come back—left the window open for his stealthy entry, which was to disturb nobody?—he who now took so high a tone, and explained his coming as so entirely accidental and justifiable. Nelly did not know what to think. She was torn in two between the conviction which lay heavy at the bottom of her heart, and the easier, the delightful faith to which he invited her with that show of high-toned indignation. And even now he said no more: a dear friend, the dearest of all—but not a word of that which would smooth away all doubt, and make it possible for her to believe that her ears had deceived her, that he had never said anything to make her doubt him. Poor Nelly was torn with trouble and perplexity. They had come to a crisis? Oh, yes! and she had felt so long that the crisis was

coming, but not—not in this guise! She sat all the evening alone, pondering how to reply, writing letter after letter, which she burned as soon as they were written. At last, after all these laborious attempts, she snatched her pen again, and wrote in great haste, taking no time to think: for the powers of thought were exhausted, and had nothing more to do in the matter. She wrote that it was best he should not come again—unless——. And then, in greater haste still, with a countenance all glowing with shame, she scratched out that word 'unless.' Oh, no, no!—not from her, whatever were the circumstances, could that suggestion come.

During the next two days a hot correspondence went on. Fitzroy wrote angrily that he respected her decision, and would not trouble her again. Then, almost before the ink was dry—before, at least, she had awakened out of the prostration of misery caused by reading this letter—there came another imploring her to reverse her judgment, to meet him, at least, somewhere, if she would not permit him to come; not to cast him off for ever, as she seemed disposed to do. Poor Nelly had very little desire to cast him off. She was brought to life by this hot protest against the severance which she felt would be death to her. She began to believe that, after all, there was nothing wanting on his part—that all he had not put into words was understood as involved in the words which he did employ. Poor Nelly! 'It must be so,' she said to herself—'it must be so!' A man in whose thoughts there was nothing but love and honour might never think it possible that he could be doubted—might feel that his truth and honesty were too certain to be questioned. 'Women in their imaginations jump at things that would horrify a man.' Was this true? Perhaps it was true. At what horror had Nelly's imagination jumped on that dreadful night? Dared she say to any one—dared she to put in words, even to herself—what she feared? Oh, no, no! She had not known what she feared. She had feared nothing, she said to herself, her cheeks burning, her bosom panting—nothing! All that she was conscious of was that this was not what he ought to have done—that he had failed in respect, that he had not felt the delicacy of the tie between them. Was that all? Surely that, after all, was not a matter of life and death.

Nelly went on reasoning with herself that had she been a man it would have been the most natural thing in the world that he should have come back, having lost his train. Had her husband

been living, had she been in her father's or her mother's house, of course he would have done so; and why should she think herself less protected by her own honour and good faith, by the presence of the children, than by these other safeguards? Nelly began to be ashamed of herself. 'Women in their imaginations jump——. Was she so little sure of herself, she cried at last to herself with burning scorn, her heart beating loud, her countenance crimson, that she attributed to him ideas altogether alien to his thoughts—that she had fled to the help of nurse as if she wanted protection? After this argument with herself, which lasted long and went through more phases than I can follow, Nelly read Fitzroy's first letter over with feelings ever varying, ever deepening in force. Had she done him wrong? She had done him wrong—cruel wrong? He had acted with simplicity all through. She it was who had put meanings he never thought of into his mind. She it was——. Oh! and she had thought herself a good woman! What horrors were those that filled a woman's imagination—things that would confound any man?

The result was that, with many a confused and trembling thought, Nelly granted to Fitzroy the interview he asked for. Something in her heart—a sick sensation of giddiness and bewilderment, as if everything had gone wrong in her life—prevented her from receiving him again at home; but she consented to meet him (of all places in the world) at the railway station—the noisy, bustling place where no quiet could be secured, where anybody might see them, where, indeed, it was impossible that they should not be seen. I wonder if any other pair ever walked about Paddington, rubbing shoulders with the calmest suburban folk, and all the daily commotion of the little commonplace trains, with such a subject between them. But we never know how often we touch tragedy as we walk about the world unconscious. They met, these two people, with such a question between them, with all the confused and incomprehensible intermediate atmosphere which veils two individual minds from each other, in the midst of all the bustle and noise, in which, in their self-absorption, they were lost as in a desert. They walked about, round and round, in the darker corners of the great area, and at last, overcome with fatigue and excitement, sat down upon a bench a little out of the way, where few passengers came. I cannot tell what was in the man's mind—if he was conscious of wrong and acting a part, or conscious of right and

only speaking as a man who felt himself to be under an unjust imputation might have a right to do. But it became very visible now if never before that he was a coarse-minded man, notwithstanding his outside of refinement, and that he no longer took the trouble to attempt to veil it as he had hitherto done. And Nelly, on the other hand, though keenly conscious of this, accepted it as if she had always known it. They had been together for nearly an hour, pacing up and down the gloomy background of the great noisy station, talking, talking; and yet she did not know with any more conviction than when they first met whether it was he or she that was in the wrong. Was he true—a man who had acted in all simplicity and honour—and she a woman with a bad imagination which had jumped at something enough to horrify a man? Nelly's mind seemed to be enveloped in cobwebs and mists, so that she could make out nothing clearly, though sometimes there pierced through these mists a keen ray of light, like an arrow, which seemed to break them up for a moment and make all plain. Ah! but it came sometimes from one side, sometimes from another, that sudden arrow cleaving the confusion. Sometimes its effect was to make her heart leap; sometimes to make it drop, down, down into the depths. Oh! if she could but see into his heart! But there is no one who can do that—not into the heart of the dearest and most near our own—or be absolutely certain of those motives which bring the smile or the sigh.

There was one strange thing, however, that this strange incident had done—it had set the two upon a level of intimate acquaintance, of sincerity in speaking to each other, which all their previous intercourse had not accomplished. With what veils of flattering illusion that intercourse had been wrapped! It had never been mentioned between them that she expected or that he withheld any proposal, that the time had come for any decision, that there was any question between them greater than the question whether he might come again to-morrow. Now that pretence had blown away for ever. When they sat down upon that bench at the dreary end of the long platform, where once in a half-hour or so a railway porter went past, or a bewildered, stray passenger, this was what Fitzroy said:

‘The thing that has risen between us now is the brutal question of marriage, and nothing else, Nelly. Oh, you needn’t cry out! I use the word “brutal” in the French sense; all that

belongs to the imagination or the fancy, all that's vague, seductive, and attractive is over. It is a brutal question——'

'Mr. Fitzroy!' cried Nelly, springing to her feet.

'Don't "Mr." me!' he cried, almost angrily, seizing her hand, drawing her to her seat again. 'What good will all this commotion do? We must face the real question; and you know this is what it is. I should never have forced it upon you; but still, here it is, and there is nothing else for it now. Don't you think I see that as well as you do? It is the only thing, and I have made up my mind to it.'

The colour that covered Nelly's face was more than a blush—it was a scorching fire. She drew further from him, raising, with what pride she could, her abashed and shamestricken head. 'If you think that I—will permit any man to speak to me so—that to make up *your* mind is enough——'

Oh! the humiliation even of that protest, the deep destroying shame even of the resentment which was a kind of avowal! For here, at least, he was logically right and she helpless, dependent for so much upon the making up of his mind.

'I can't stop,' he said, 'after all that's past, Nelly, to pick my words. Here's the fact: I was an ass, I suppose, to go back that night. I was off my head; and you had not given me any reason to suppose you were a prude. I had not expected to find—the British matron up in arms, and an old witch of a duenna to watch over her mistress! What more harm is there in talking to a lady after midnight than before? I can't see it. But we needn't argue. After all this fuss, and the maid, and the vicaress, and so on, there's nothing, I say, but this brutal question of marriage. Can't you sit still, now, and hear me out?'

'You have no right,' she said—'you have no right—to speak to me in that tone!'

'What tone? There is nothing particular that I know of in my tone. I haven't time to pick my tones any more than my words. Your train will be going soon, and the deuced affair must be settled somehow. Look here! it is horribly inconvenient for me to get married now. I have no money, and I have a lot of debts to pay. A marriage in St. George's, published in the papers and all that, would simply make an end of me. These tradesmen fellows know everything; they would give each other the word: Married a widow with a family and with no money! By Jove! that would finish me!'

‘Mr. Fitzroy!’

‘I tell you not to “Mr.” me, Nelly. You know my name, I suppose. We are past all that. The question now is how to manage the one business without bursting up the other. Making a regular smash of my affairs can’t do you any good, can it? We’ll have to go abroad; and we can’t, of course, take those chicks—dragging a nursery about with us all over the world. Keep still! you’ll frighten that porter.’ He had seized and held her arm tightly, restraining her. ‘For goodness sake be reasonable, now, Nelly. You don’t suppose I mean you any harm. How could I?’ he added, with a harsh laugh, ‘you’re much too wide awake for that. Listen to what I say, Nelly.’

‘I cannot—I cannot endure this,’ she cried.

‘We may neither of us like it,’ said Fitzroy, with composure, ‘but you ought to have thought of that a little sooner. There’s nothing else for it now that I can see. Speak up if you know any other way. I don’t want to ruin you, and you, I suppose, don’t want to ruin me. There’s no other way.’

‘There is the way—of parting here, and never seeing each other more!’

He held her fast, with her arm drawn closely through his. ‘That’s the most impracticable of all,’ he said. ‘For one thing, I don’t want to part and never see you more.’

Oh, poor Nelly! poor Nelly! She was outraged in every point of pride and tenderness and feeling, and yet the softness of this tone sank into her heart, and carried, like a flood, all her bulwarks away.

‘Well, and then it couldn’t be done. You’ve gone too far, with your Vicaress, and all that. I don’t want to ruin you; and neither, I suppose, do you want to ruin me. Look here, Nelly: I’ve got a little money at present—by chance, as it happens. I’ll buy a licence—it’s all you’ll have from me in the shape of wedding present—and you’ll run up to town to-morrow morning, and we’ll be married at the registrar’s office. Can’t help it, Nelly; can’t do anything better. It is no fault of mine.’

There was silence for a moment. Nelly was not able to speak. Her heart was beating as if it would burst; her whole nature revolting, resisting, in a horror and conflict indescribable. At length she burst forth: ‘It is a brutal question, indeed, indeed—a brutal question!’ she cried, scarcely able with her trembling lips to form the words.

'Well, didn't I say so? But we can't help it; there's nothing else left to do. I am not an infernal cad—altogether: and you're not—altogether—a fool. We may have been that—that last—both of us; but there's no use going over all that again. Nelly, compose yourself—compose yourself!'

'I cannot! I cannot!' she cried, struggling with that burst and flood of misery which is one of the shames and terrors of a woman. It had come to such a point that she could not compose herself, or resist the wild tide of passion that carried her away. Passion! ah, not of love—of shame, of horror, of self-disgust, of humiliation unspeakable. A woman who has had poor Nelly's experiences seldom retains a girl's dream of superlative womanhood, of the crown and the sceptre. But to endure to be spoken to like this—to feel the question to be not one between two lovers, but between a man who was not 'an infernal cad' and a woman who was not 'a fool:' to submit to all this because there was nothing else for it, to be obliged by her reason to acquiesce in it—was almost more than flesh and blood could bear. She kept in, by the exertion of all her strength, those heartrending sobs and cries within her own bosom as much as was possible. Even in the depth of her misery she was aware that to betray herself, to collect a crowd round, would be worse still, and must be avoided at any price. Finally, poor Nelly found herself, all wounded and bruised with the conflict, exhausted as if she were going to die, alone in the railway carriage in which Fitzroy had placed her, kissing her openly in sight of the guard as he left her, and bidding her remember that he would meet her at eleven o'clock to-morrow. At eleven o'clock to-morrow! It seemed to ring in her ears all the way down, like a bell going on with the same chime. Eleven o'clock! Eleven o'clock to-morrow!—for why? for why?

CHAPTER IX.

THINKING, thinking all the long night through did not seem to do poor Nelly any good. She had arrived at home so exhausted in mind and body, so chilled to the heart, that she was good for nothing but to retire to bed. She was scarcely able to see the children—the children, whom perhaps in a day or two—. Oh! should she not secure every moment of them, every look of the innocent faces that were her own, lay up in her heart every

innocent word, with that dreadful possibility before her? But the effect was exactly the reverse. The sight of them seemed to fill her with a sick horror. She could not meet their eyes, could not bear their caresses, turned from them with an awful sense that she had betrayed them. And then all the night through in the dark she lay awake thinking, thinking, listening to the clock striking—the vigilant clock, which watched and waited, measuring out the unhasting time, never forgetting, looking on whatever happened. It would strike eleven o'clock to-morrow in the calm little unalarmed house where nobody would suspect that the young mother, the smiling and loving guardian of the children, had come to her hour of doom. For a long time her mind held to this as if it were a sentence which had to be carried out. Eleven o'clock to-morrow, eleven o'clock! a thing which she could not alter, which had to be done. Then by-and-by, which was worse still, there flashed into her soul the thought that it was no sentence, but a thing subject to her own decision, which she might do—or not. Or not! She was free; it was for her to settle, to do it or not to do it. I don't know how to explain how much worse this was. To be held fast by a verdict, sentenced at a certain hour to do something which perhaps you would rather die than do, but which you must do, your dying or not dying being a matter of indifference—is a very terrible thing: yet even in this the *must* gives a certain support. But to be cast back again into a sea of doubt from which you have to get out as best you may, in which you must decide for yourself, choose—this or that, settle what to do, what not to do; the choice being not between pleasure and pain, between good and evil, as it used to be in the old days—but only of two tortures, which was the worst and which the best.

The result of this terrible night was at least to solve the question for eleven o'clock to-morrow: for she was to ill to stand, her limbs aching and her head aching when to-morrow came. It was dreadful to Nelly to have to call nurse, who already half knew so much, and to send her with the necessary telegram. 'Too ill to move—postpone for a day or two' was, after long labour with her aching head and perturbed brain, all she could think of to say: and she had scarcely said it when it flashed upon her that the very word 'postpone' was a kind of pledge, and committed her to an acceptance of everything he had settled upon, though even this did not hurt like the look which nurse gave her when she saw Fitzroy's name—a look, not of reproach, but of anxious

curiosity. Before this time poor Nelly had begun to feel to her very soul the misery of having a confidant. It is a comfort in some cases: it relieves the full heart to speak, it sometimes gives support, the support of being understood in a difficult crisis. But it also gives to the person confided in a right to follow further developments, to know what happens after, to ask—to look. 'You did not come as you promised, dear?' Mrs. Glynn had said to her, 'you did not bring him to see us.' The Rector's wife doubted, but did not know certainly, that Fitzroy had not come. 'No,' Nelly had faltered, 'I did not, I—could not.' 'But to-morrow! promise me, promise me faithfully that you will bring him to-morrow. Dear, let us have the comfort of seeing you two together.' Nelly had only nodded her head, she could not trust her voice to speak. This was before the interview at Paddington. And Mrs. Glynn had gone away sorrowing. She was very anxious about the poor young woman whose life was thus compromised by what might turn out to be a bad man. She could not comprehend why all was not settled by this time, and the lover ready to satisfy her friends. She took Nelly's hands in both hers, and kissed her, and looked wistfully in her face. Poor Nelly had felt as if she must sink into the ground. She could not meet her friend's eyes. She gave no sign of reply, no answering look: but dropped the kind hands that held hers, and turned back into the house, which was a refuge at least for the time.

But she was not safe even in her house, for nurse also had been her confidant, and had a half right to ask, an undoubted right to look. Her eyes when they flashed upon the name of Fitzroy in Nelly's telegram were terrible. Well-trained woman as she was, she raised those eyes instinctively to Nelly's face with a question in them before which Nelly's, hot with fever yet dim with tears, fell. Oh, if she had said nothing, if she had but kept the whole story to herself! But that had been impossible, he had made it impossible. When she had confided the telegram to nurse she gave instructions that she was not to be disturbed, and lay, with her blinds down, in the darkened room, trembling lest Mrs. Glynn should force the *consigne*, and find the way to her bedside in spite of all precautions. It was bad enough to be questioned when she had nothing to reply; what would it be when her heart and mind were so full? Nelly lay there in the dark the whole day with her troubled thoughts. In an hour or two nurse came back, bringing the children from their walk, and

told her mistress that they had walked as far as Deanham, a little neighbouring village, and that she had sent the telegram from that office, which she hoped would not matter. It mattered only so far as to send a fiery dart through Mrs. Brunton, who divined at once that this was done to save her—that no local telegraph clerk might be able to betray the fact of her communication with Fitzroy. And Mrs. Glynn called, and was repulsed, not without difficulty, and left her love, and a promise—which was to Nelly as a threat—of calling early to-morrow. And once more there came the night when all was silent, when there was no one even to look a question, when Nelly was left alone again to battle with her thoughts.

Alone, to battle with her thoughts. With this addition, that if she remained here and faced her trouble, and resolved to tread the stony path, to bear the penalty of her indiscretion, and cling to her children—she would have Mrs. Glynn to meet in the morning, to explain to her that Mr. Fitzroy had not come and was not coming, that all this stormy episode was over, and to endure her astonishment, her questions, perhaps her reproaches. And nurse, too, to nurse there would be due some explanation—nurse, who had seen everything, who had gone on the river with them, who had known of all his constant visits, before that last visit which had brought to a crisis the whole foolish, foolish story. Oh, how well everything had been before he ever came; how contented she had been with her children, how pleased with her little house, how much approved by everybody! Nelly believed in all good faith that she would have been quite contented and happy had Fitzroy never appeared to disturb her life, alone in her tranquillity with her children: but it may be doubted whether her confidence would have been justified. At all events, now, she shivered when she looked forward upon that life which would lie before her if this was to be the end. Alone, with the children. Oh, how dear the children were! But they were so little, such babies, not companions for a woman in the full tide and height of her life. Mrs. Glynn would be kind she knew, but a little suspicious of her. Nurse would watch her as if she were a giddy girl, she would not dare to open her doors to anyone, to offer a curate a cup of tea! I don't say that Nelly was guilty of such thoughts as these in her musing—but they drifted through her desolate, solitary, abandoned soul, abandoned of all comfort and counsel. Whereas, on the other side——

In a great many histories of human experience it is taken for granted—and indeed, perhaps, before the reign of analysis began it was almost always taken for granted—that when man or woman of the nobler kind found that a lover was unworthy, their love died along with their respect. This has simplified matters in many a story. It is such a good way out of it, and saves so much trouble! The last great instance I can remember is that of the noble Romola and Tito her husband, whom, though he gives her endless trouble, she is able to drop out of her stronghold of love, as soon as she knows how little worthy of it is the fascinating delightful false Greek. My own experience is all the other way. Life, I think, is not so easy as that comes to. Nelly understood a great deal more of Mr. Fitzroy now than she might have done in other circumstances had she been married to him for years. She had seen him all round in a flash of awful reality and perception, and hated him—yet loved him all the same. She did not attempt to put these feelings in their order, to set so much on one side and so much on the other. She knew now, as she had never done before, what love could mean in some natures. How it could be base, and yet not all base, and how a man who was only not altogether a cad, to use his own description, apprehended that passion. And yet it did not matter to her, it did not affect the depth of her heart, any more than it would have affected her had he lost his good looks or his beautiful voice. Ah yes! it did matter! It turned her very love, herself, her life into things so different that they were scarcely recognisable. The elements of hate were in her love, an opposition and distrust ineradicable took possession of her being: and yet she belonged to him, and he to her, almost the more for this contradiction. These are mysteries which I do not attempt to explain.

Yet, notwithstanding all this terrible consciousness, when Nelly awoke next morning (for she was tired out and slept notwithstanding everything), and remembered all that lay before her, and the decision she had to make, the two things which immediately flashed upon her mind, small things of no real importance—were, the look which nurse would fix upon her, trying to read her thoughts, and the inevitable call of Mrs. Glynn. They were not Mrs. Grundy—oh, how little, how petty, how poor was anything that the frivolous call Mrs. Grundy! They were women who were fond of her, who would stand for her and defend her, women who, alas! were her confidants. They had a right to know. Of

all that stood in her way and made the crisis dreadful, there was nothing at this moment so dreadful as the glance of suppressed anxiety, the question, that did not venture to put itself into words, of nurse's look, and the more open, more unconcealed gaze of Mrs. Glynn. She felt that she would not, could not, bear these, whatever she might have to bear.

I do not pretend to say that this was what finally turned the scale. Was there any doubt from the beginning how it would turn? She came downstairs very early on that dreadful morning and breakfasted with the children, and dressed them with her own hands for their walk, fastening every little button, putting on each little glove. She kissed them again and again before she gave them over to nurse, who was waiting—and stood at the door looking after them until they had disappeared beyond the garden gate. Then she, who had seemed so full of leisure, all at once became nervous and hurried. She called the housemaid to her, who was busy with her work. 'Mary,' she said, 'I have to run up to town by the half-past ten train. I have not a moment to lose; if Mrs. Glynn should come you must tell her that I am gone, and I will slip out by the back door—for if she comes in I know I shall miss my train.' 'Yes, ma'am,' said Mary, making no remark, but thinking all the more. Happily, however, Mrs. Glynn did not come, and Mrs. Brunton left the house in good time for the train, carrying her dressing bag. 'It is possible I may not get home again to-night,' she said. 'Give this to nurse, Mary. I forgot to give it to her; and if any one inquires, say I have gone to town for a few days.' Mary never knew how she could have made so bold. She cried out: 'Oh, ma'am, I hope as you are not going to leave us.' 'To leave you!' said Nelly. 'What nonsense you are speaking! How could I leave you?' But she was not angry; she gave the girl a look which made Mary cry, though she could not have told why.

What was left for nurse was a letter with a cheque enclosed, imploring her to take the greatest care of the children till she could send for them. 'I may tell you to satisfy you that I am going to be married,' Nelly wrote. 'We want to have no fuss. And I could not take the children; but as soon as—as we are settled I shall send for you to bring my little darlings. Oh, take care of them, take care of them!' And that was all; not an address, not an indication where she had gone. Nurse did not say a word to anyone as long as her courage held out. When

Mrs. Glynn, after receiving her message from the housemaid, asked to see the more important servant, nurse made her face like a countenance cut out of wood. She could give no explanation. Mrs. Brunton had gone to town for a few days. Perhaps she might be detained a little longer. It was on business she had gone. 'But it was very sudden?' cried Mrs. Glynn. 'Yes, ma'am,' said nurse. 'And you don't know what day she will be back?' 'No, ma'am,' replied the faithful servant. There was nothing more to be learned from her.

She kept this up as long, I have said, as her courage held out; and indeed a week strained that courage very much. The servants all grew frightened left in the house alone. They did not know how to contain themselves, or to bear up in the unusual leisure and quiet. I think that nurse held out for ten days. And then she wrote to Mrs. Brunton's married sister—for Nelly's mother was an old lady, and not to be disturbed. After this there ensued a whirl of agitation and trouble, in which the cook and the housemaid found much satisfaction. The sister came, and then her husband, and after them a brother and uncle, all in consternation. Nelly's letter to nurse was read over and over, and much of what had passed before was elicited by anxious questioning. 'Depend upon it she has gone off with this man,' said the uncle solemnly, and nobody contradicted him, the fact being self-evident. 'Fitzroy—of what Fitzroys I wonder?' said the brother, who thought he knew society. Finally, Nelly's brother, who was young and impetuous, started off for the Continent in search of her, and the married sister took the children home.

Poor little children! they were so forlorn, and so ignorant, crying for Mamma, such little things! Consoled by a box of chocolate, treated very kindly, oh very kindly! but not kings and queens, nurse said with tears, as in their own home. And the poor mother, poor Nelly—where was she? She was discussed by everybody, all her affairs, whether she were really married, or what dreadful thing had happened to her: how she could go away, for any man, and leave her children. All that she had kept most private to herself was raked up and gone over, and her conduct at Bampton-Leigh, and how all this had begun. Poor Nelly! all the world was in her secret now.

CHAPTER X.

THE children had been but a week at the house of Mrs. Evans, Nelly's sister, when a letter arrived, first sent to Haven Green, then by various stages to their present habitation, to nurse, asking for news of them. It was rather a melancholy letter. 'I cannot send for my darlings yet, and it is dreadful to be without any news. Mr. Fitzroy and I are moving about so much that I can scarcely give you an address; but write at once, and if we are no longer here, I will leave word where we are going, and your letter can follow me'; and again a cheque was enclosed, signed with the name of Helen Fitzroy. 'Say, if anybody inquires, that we may come back any day,' she added in a postscript. It was evident that she had over-estimated nurse's courage, that she had calculated upon her remaining quietly at home, until further orders: and the assumption made nurse feel exceedingly guilty, as if she had betrayed her mistress. A short time after, information came from the family solicitor that he had received Nelly's orders to sell all the property that Mrs. Brunton had in her own power, and forward the money to her at another address, different from that given to nurse. It was not a sum which represented very much in the way of income, yet it was a large sum to be realised without a word of explanation, and roused the worst auguries in everybody's breast. Needless to say that both addresses were telegraphed at once to the impetuous brother who was raving about Europe, looking under every table in every hotel for Nelly. Needless also to add that she was found at last.

But here exact information fails. Her brother Herbert never described how he found her, or went into any unnecessary details. The pair, who were henceforward spoken of in the family as the Fitzroys, were at Monte Carlo when he came up with them, and it was evident enough that 'my new brother-in-law,' as Herbert called him, awakened no enthusiasm in the young man's breast. He acknowledged that he thought the fellow was in his proper place among the queer society there, though it was not much like Nelly; and there it appeared they meant to remain, on the ground that Nelly had showed some symptoms of delicate health, and it was thought expedient that she should winter in the south of France, which made it impossible for her to have the children with her, as she had intended. 'So far as that goes, Nelly was silly,'

Herbert said; 'how could she expect a fellow newly married to have another man's children dragging after him all over the place? And she knew they'd be safe with Susan.' Susan Evans took this very quietly; but she knew that Nelly had not intended the children to be with her, but had meant to send for them, or to come back to them, leaving the issue to the decision of after events. Poor Nelly, she looked delicate, Herbert allowed. She was not like herself. He confessed, when he was alone with his sister, and had become confidential, walking about the room in the twilight when the changes of his countenance could not be remarked, that perhaps Nelly had made a mistake, and he was not sure that she had not found it out.

'Do you mean that he is unkind to her?' cried Susan, all aflame.

'I should just like,' said Herbert, grimly, 'to have seen any man unkind to her while I was there.'

'Isn't he fond of her, then? Then why did he marry her? Do you mean that they're unhappy, Herbert? So soon, so soon!'

'Now, look here,' said Herbert, 'I won't be cross-examined; I say that I think Nelly has made a mistake, and I fear she thinks so too. I can't go into metaphysical questions why people did that, or why they did this. I'm not fond myself of Mr. Percy Fitzroy—and we are not done with him yet,' Herbert said.

'Done with him? and he Nelly's husband: I should hope not, indeed!' Mrs. Evans cried.

'Then I promise you you'll have your wish,' her brother replied.

And indeed, for the next year or two there was a great deal heard of Mr. Percy Fitzroy. One thing that developed itself in the further history of poor Nelly was a chronic want of money. She disposed of everything over which she had the least power. Her little house was, of course, sold and everything in it. What was the good of keeping it up? and even the Indian curiosities, the little stock of plate, all the things of which Nelly Brunton had been proud. What did all that matter now? These trifles served to stop the wolf's mouth for a very short time, and then Herbert began to receive letters by every post, which he showed to nobody. He was the head of the family, and he was the only one who was fully acquainted with the affairs of the Fitzroys. He gained a prominent line on his forehead, which might have been called the Fitzroy wrinkle, from this constant

traffic and anxiety, and nobody knew but himself how far these claims and applications went.

Meanwhile the poor little children remained in the nursery of Mrs. Evans; not poor little children at all—much benefited, at least in Mrs. Evans' opinion, by the superior discipline of a large family. Susan was of opinion that whoever suffered by Nelly's second marriage, to little Jack and Maysey all things had worked together for good. How much better it was for them to be brought up with a little wholesome neglect among a great number of nice children, who were very kind to their little cousins, than spoiled to the top of their bent by Nelly, who gave them everything they wanted, and kept up no discipline at all? And, indeed, there could not be a doubt that it was far better for them to be in the wholesome English nursery than dragging about through a series of hotels after their mother and their mother's husband. It was against her judgment that Mrs. Evans kept nurse devoted to their special service; but she did so, for, though she thought a great deal of her own system, she was a kind woman, and very sorry for poor Nelly, thus separated from her children, though at the same time very angry and indignant with her for submitting to it. 'I should like to see Henry, or any other man, try to keep me from my children!' Susan cried. But then Henry Evans, good man, had no such desire, nor naturally, in his lifetime, had any other man the right.

It need scarcely be said that the subject was discussed in all its aspects at Haven Green, where nobody knew anything, and there was the widest field for conjecture. Mrs. Glynn, who never would allow an unkind word to be said of Mrs. Brunton, now Mrs. Fitzroy, in her hearing, blamed herself very much that she had not watched Nelly more closely and that the Rector had not interfered. 'For if my husband had married them, even if it had been by special license in her own drawing-room—though I disapprove of that sort of proceeding very much—yet not a word could have been said.' 'I suppose it was done at a registry-office,' said some ill-natured person. 'We have none of us any right to suppose such a thing,' Mrs. Glynn replied. Well! there were dark whispers in corners that it might have been even worse than that—though, of course, now that the family had taken it up it was clear that all must be right; but these whispers were not uttered in the presence of the Rector or of Mrs. Glynn, who avowed boldly that she had been in Mrs. Brunton's confidence all the time.

You cannot do much harm, it may be proudly asserted, when you unbosom yourself to your clergyman's wife!

Among all poor Nelly's sympathisers and anxious supporters there was no one more anxious—no one, it may be said, so compunctious—as Julia Bampton. She said that she could never forgive herself, for it was she who had introduced dear Nelly to Percy Fitzroy. She it was, all unwitting of evil, who had thrown them together. Mrs. Spencer-Jackson, indeed, had brought him into the county, but it was at Bampton-Leigh that he had been taken up most warmly and made most of. It was because of his voice—such a beautiful baritone voice; and Julia herself—Julia, who spoke with tears in her eyes, had thrown them together, made them sing together, brought it all on. She could never forgive herself for this, though she hoped with all her heart that poor Nelly, though she had been so imprudent, was happier than people said. By this time May had married Bertie Harcourt, and was the brightest of young matrons, with a handsome house and an adoring husband, and nothing but happiness about her. She, too, was very sorry for Nelly, and said she had always thought there was something queer, like a man in a book, about Mr. Percy Fitzroy.

And thus it came about that the poor little Brunton children were a great deal at Bampton-Leigh, where there was no discipline at all, and which seemed to them the most delightful place in the world. They called Julia aunt, *en attendant* the arrival of Harcourt children who would have a right to address her by that title, and made up to her in such a surprising way for the absence of May that their visits were the happiest portions of her life. Julia was seated with them in the drawing-room on an evening in October about two years after these events, telling them stories, Maysey's little figure buried in her lap (for the good Julia began to grow stout), and Jack leaning closely against her knee. It was growing dark, but the fire was bright and filled the room with ruddy gleams and fantastic shadows and reflections. She had come to a very touching point in the story, and Maysey had flung her arms round aunt Julia's neck in the thrill of the approaching catastrophe which the children both knew by heart, yet heard over and over again with undiminished delight and horror. They all heard the door open, but paid no attention, supposing it was the tea: and Julia had told the tale all out, and the nervous clasp of the child's arms had loosened, when, looking up, Miss Bampton saw—not in actual reality, but in the great mirror over the mantel-

piece—a shadowy figure standing over them, a woman in a travelling cloak, with a great veil like a cloud hanging over her face. Julia gave a shriek that rang through the house, and the veiled figure dropped down upon the hearthrug on its knees, and encircled the whole group with eager arms. 'O Nelly, Nelly, Nelly!' Julia cried, thinking at first that it was a ghost.

When the lights came it was visible that both things were true—that it was Nelly, and that she was little more than the ghost of herself. It was some time before the frightened children—who had forgotten her, and who were terrified by her paleness, and her cloak and her veil, and her sudden arrival—would acknowledge their mother. Oh, how different from the Nelly who had arrived there on that summer afternoon, and stopped the singing at the piano, and diverted (as Julia in the profoundest depths of her heart was aware) from May's path an evil fate. She bore all the traces of that evil fate upon her own worn countenance. She was very pale, worn, and thin: she was not like herself. But when she had rested from her journey, and recovered the confidence of her children, then the old house of her kindred became aware of another Nelly, who was not like the first, yet was a more distinct and remarkable personage than Nelly Brunton. She was dressed in all the elegance of the fashion, and she had an air which the country lady did not understand. Was it natural stateliness and nobility? Or was it only the tragedy of her unknown fate?

Nelly stayed and lingered in the calm of Bampton-Leigh. It seemed as if she never could separate herself from the children. It was with reluctance that she allowed them to be put to bed, or to go out for their play. She could not bear them out of her sight, and she never spoke of Mr. Percy Fitzroy except when questions were put to her. When Mrs. Spencer-Jackson came to see her, with effusive welcome, she received that lady with extreme coldness, holding her at arm's length. 'My husband is quite well,' was all she answered to a thousand inquiries. Letters came to her 'from abroad' at rare intervals, and she herself wrote very seldom. She never looked as if she wanted to hear anything except about her little boy and girl.

And for anything I have heard she is there still, much wondered at, yet very kindly cherished, good Julia asking no questions, at Bampton-Leigh.

THE END.

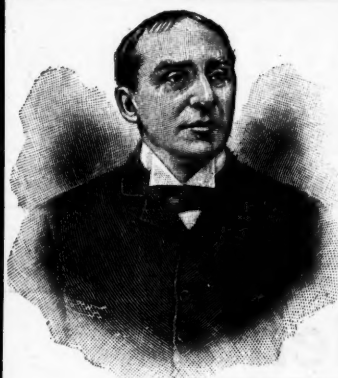
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To all above, and to all below;

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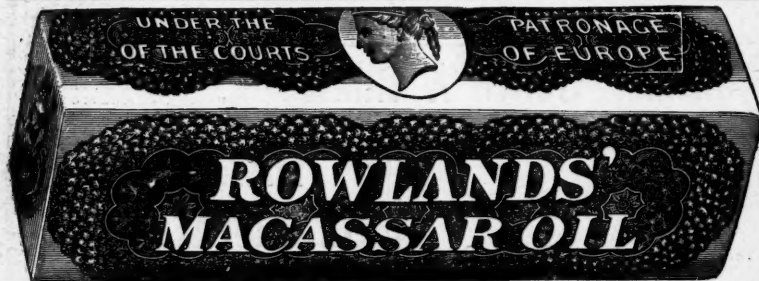
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CAUTION.—Examine each Bottle, and see that the CAPSULE is marked ENO'S 'FRUIT SALT.' Without it, you have been imposed on by a worthless imitation. Sold by all Chemists. Prepared only at

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